

LANDSCAPES OF MONASTIC FOUNDATION

The Establishment of Religious Houses in
East Anglia, c.650-1200

Tim Pestell

Anglo-Saxon Studies

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MONASTIC FOUNDATION

The Establishment of Religious Houses in
East Anglia c.650–1200

Monasteries lie at the heart of the medieval landscape – physical, social and spiritual. In this volume Tim Pestell charts their evolution from the earliest period of the Anglo-Saxon conversion to the end of the twelfth century, drawing on historical and archaeological evidence, and emphasising the role of landscape and politics in religious practice. Basing his study on East Anglia, he first addresses the Middle Anglo-Saxon period of monastic foundation, with a look at the likely appearance of early monasteries or minsters. The traditional assumption of monastic collapse in the face of Viking raids is subjected to critical scrutiny, and the emergence of the reformed Benedictine monasteries, and the influence of geography and politics in their foundation, is explored (as is documentary evidence for their dating). This early history of monastic settlement underpins the author's claim that the Normans largely established new monasteries where there were already communities – a contradiction of the usual view of the nature of Norman monastic ideology and reform.

Dr TIM PESTELL completed his Ph.D. at the University of East Anglia; he is Curator of Archaeology at Norwich Castle Museum.

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Iken church, Suffolk, standing on a peninsula jutting into the Alde estuary. The site is probably that of Botolph's *monasterium* of *Icanho*, founded in 654.

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Tim Pestell

THE BOYDELL PRESS

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Abbreviations

BAR	British Archaeological Reports monograph series (Oxford)
BL	British Library
CBA	Council for British Archaeology
CCCO	Corpus Christi College, Oxford
CChR	<i>Calendar of Charter Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office</i> , PRO Texts and Calendars, 6 vols (London, 1903–27)
CPR	<i>Calendar of Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office</i> , PRO Calendars (London, 1891–)
CRO	Cambridgeshire Record Office
EHD	<i>English Historical Documents</i> , i: c.500–1042, ed. D. Whitelock, 2nd edn (London, 1979); ii: 1042–1189, ed. D. C. Douglas and G. W. Greenaway, 2nd edn (London, 1981)
GDB	Greater Domesday Book
HE	<i>Bede's Ecclesiastical History</i> , ed. and transl. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 1969)
LDB	Little Domesday Book
LE	<i>Liber Eliensis</i> , ed. E. O. Blake, Camden Society 3rd ser. 92 (London, 1962)
Margary	I. D. Margary, <i>Roman Roads in Britain</i> , 3rd edn (London, 1973); figures immediately following indicate the allotted road number
NAU	Norfolk Archaeological Unit
NCM	Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery
NES	Norfolk Earthworks Survey
NRO	Norfolk Record Office
OE	Old English
PRO	Public Record Office
RCHME	Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, Swindon
S	P. H. Sawyer (ed.), <i>Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography</i> , Royal Historical Society Guides and Handbooks (London, 1968), and the online 'Electronic Sawyer', available at http://www.trin.cam.ac.uk/users/sdk13/chartwww ; figures immediately following S indicate the charter number
SAU	Suffolk Archaeological Unit
SMR	Sites and Monuments Record
SROB	Suffolk Record Office, Bury St Edmunds Branch
TRE	<i>Tempore regis Edwardi</i> , in Edward's time, i.e. 1042–66 but more generally used in the sense by or at 1066

Abbreviations

<i>TRW</i>	<i>Tempore regis Willelmi</i> , in William's time, i.e. 1066–86, but more generally used in the sense by or in 1086
<i>VCH</i>	The Victoria History of the Counties of England, ed. H. A. Doubleday, L. E. Salzman <i>et al.</i> (London, 1900–)

Introduction: Past and Present Approaches to Monastic Studies

THAT monasticism constituted a major influence upon the Early Medieval landscape has never been in doubt. Much has been written about how certain orders, notably the Cistercians, exploited their landholdings and still more orthodox has been the view that monasteries sought isolated or reclusive positions within the countryside. This perspective has undoubtedly been aided by the writings of ecclesiastics themselves, for instance, the Peterborough monk Hugh Candidus. Writing in the early twelfth century, he suggested that the islands of the Fens ‘I believe God himself raised, with the intention that it should be the habitation of those servants of God who had chosen to dwell there.’¹ Sentiments such as these burned deeply in the monastic psyche. Curiously, they have received relatively little critical investigation by scholars, despite advances in landscape studies that have shown how landscapes could be actively structured in symbolic and iconographic ways.² Instead, monastic studies have tended to remain innately conservative, frequently following research agenda derived from the earliest, antiquarian, investigation of monasteries. It is notable, for instance, that in several recent synthetic works about monasteries, discussion has centred upon the construction and development of the physical church, cloister, and precinct outbuildings.³ Theoretically-informed approaches such as Roberta Gilchrist’s application of a gender-archaeological analysis to nunneries remain an important exception,⁴ but the wider landscape into which a monastic foundation was made has usually been considered only in terms of case-studies of individual houses. This book attempts to redress such a regrettable situation by studying the patterns of monastic foundation in an entire region, that of East Anglia. Examples of the particular are examined from a wider perspective, to see how a cenobitic existence was practised or produced its own distinct material culture, how typical patterns in house location really are, and equally importantly, how these patterns may relate to wider questions of social and political geography.

If there has been a lack of critical investigation into the wider landscape setting of monasteries, an equally fundamental problem has been the chronological

¹ Mellows and Mellows (eds and transl.), *Peterborough Chronicle*, p. 2; Mellows (ed.), *Chronicle of Hugh Candidus*, pp. 4–5.

² Muir, ‘Conceptualising landscape’. A recent examination using monasteries is Menuge, ‘The foundation myth’.

³ See for instance Coppack, *Abbeys and Priories* and Greene, *Medieval Monasteries*.

⁴ Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*.

division usually adopted in monastic studies. Communal religious life did not begin at the Norman Conquest but because only a small number of Anglo-Saxon monasteries have left more than ephemeral material remains archaeologists have frequently concentrated on that which was more easily visible. As a result the bulk of excavated material relates to Norman or later institutions. Further fragmentation has occurred with an archaeological predilection for taxonomy and a concentration on ‘types’, studying particular post-Conquest monastic orders. In the last twenty years more confident steps have been taken to discuss the archaeology of the Anglo-Saxon Church, but synthetic works have generally perpetuated chronological divisions.⁵ Historians have often been little better and even David Knowles’ magisterial *The Monastic Order in England* (1963) treated the golden age of Bede and Northumbrian monasticism only as introductory material to a Benedictine history beginning with the tenth-century monastic reform. The pre-Conquest origins of many of the most powerful monasteries of the Middle Ages only stress the need to understand this Anglo-Saxon background.

Finally, a true integration of archaeological and historical data has rarely been attempted. Each academic discipline has had its own agenda and, especially for the post-Conquest period, copious datasets with which to work.⁶ Paradoxically, rarely have either been used to explore the place of the monastery in the landscape and what this meant to contemporary populations. This book aims to undertake just such an analysis, using the region of East Anglia, as I have stated, as a study area within the chronological parameters c.650–1200. To achieve this, we need first to investigate the antiquarian background to monastic study and how this has manifested itself in East Anglia.

ANTIQUARIANISM AND THE HISTORY OF MONASTIC RESEARCH

Medieval monasteries long attracted the antiquary, and while scholarly study only intensified in the nineteenth century, many research agenda had, by then, already been set.⁷ In particular, the Romantic movement of the preceding century proved influential, stimulating interest in monastic ruins from an artistic perspective and in many cases leading to their manipulation. While alterations might be carried out on a large scale, as with William Aislaby’s selective demolitions and additions to Fountains Abbey in Yorkshire,⁸ lesser foundations were equally affected. At Thetford, Holy Sepulchre Priory had a grotto added to its nave walls,⁹ while at Walsingham in Norfolk, the upstanding priory church east end wall was preserved in the middle of an extensive garden, and much drawn and engraved.

⁵ For instance Greene’s *Medieval Monasteries*, Platt’s *Abbeys and Priories of Medieval England*, Thompson’s *Women Religious*, and, in an East Anglian context, Messent’s *Monastic Remains of Norfolk and Suffolk* and Haigh’s *Religious Houses of Cambridgeshire*. Mick Aston’s *Monasteries in the Landscape* provides an honourable exception to the chronological divide.

⁶ Austin, ‘“Proper study” of medieval archaeology’, pp. 11–13.

⁷ Clarke, *Archaeology of Medieval England and Wales*, p. 81.

⁸ Coppack, *Abbeys and Priories*, p. 145.

⁹ Hare, ‘Priory of the Holy Sepulchre’, pp. 192–3.



Plate 1. Dr Syntax inspecting some ecclesiastical ruins. From a watercolour by Thomas Rowlandson of c.1809, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

The portrayal of these sites was popular from the mid-eighteenth century in the engravings of, for instance, the Buck brothers, and lasted well into the nineteenth century, seen for example in Cotman's *Architectural Antiquities of Norfolk* (1818). Indeed, the approach was so prevalent as to be satirised by William Combe and Thomas Rowlandson in their literary creation Dr Syntax, who first appeared in 1809 undertaking his *Search of the Picturesque*. In meditating upon a particularly fine ruin to which he has journeyed on his tour, Syntax concludes 'Alas! No more remains, than will reward the painter's pains' and declares he will 'Take the view, As well as my best art can do' (Plate 1).¹⁰

Antiquarian studies of monastic foundations increasingly came to take two forms – historical and structural. The former saw the large-scale transcription of manuscript material, and the seminal work, William Dugdale's *Monasticon Anglicanum* (1655–73), went through several revisions, being effectively rewritten in the six-volume Caley, Ellis and Bandinel edition published between 1817 and 1830. Study of medieval buildings and their architecture resulted more dramatically in the Victorian Gothic Revival, with its interest in the design and technicalities of Gothic architecture, and created authentic copies of mouldings and tracery. Throughout, the emphasis focused on the physical appearance of the monasteries rather than a deeper understanding of the society and forces that had created them.

¹⁰ Combe and Rowlandson, *The Tour of Dr Syntax in Search of the Picturesque*, pp. 70–1. Plate 1 is in fact from a watercolour that was not eventually used as an engraving in the *Tour*: Hardie, 'Tours of Dr Syntax: Rowlandson's unpublished illustrations'. Combe seems to have been particularly stimulated (to satirise) by the work of William Gilpin (1742–1804) who wrote about several tours he had undertaken, and who delighted in pastoral and gothic scenes: Savory, *Thomas Rowlandson's Doctor Syntax Drawings*, p. 8 and n. 1.

Landscapes of Monastic Foundation

The study of monastic sites in East Anglia can be seen against this national background, with works such as Taylor's *Index Monasticus* (1821), which listed in an ordered collection all the religious communities founded in the diocese of Norwich. This blossoming of antiquarian interest at a local level was also seen in the foundation of the Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society, publishing its journal *Norfolk Archaeology* from 1847, and the Bury and West Suffolk Archaeological Institute, later the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology, whose *Proceedings* began publication a year later. Their early volumes are filled with invariably short accounts of members' findings, often displaying a joy in *objets trouvées* or the editing of a handful of house charters or account rolls. More detailed interpretation or synthesis was generally lacking. The enthusiasm of the period is well exemplified by Dawson Turner's *Illustration of the Topography of Norfolk* (1841), privately published, which listed his collection of illustrations and engravings that he had had bound into his copy of Blomefield's *History of Norfolk*, so that others might be able to use it.¹¹

Even as late as 1842 the influence of the Romantic movement was clear to see in Charles Green's otherwise useful *History, Antiquities and Geology of Bacton*, in describing Bromholm Priory:

With feelings approaching somewhat to the sublime, the lover of antiquity beholds the ruins of former days, he muses on the remnants of departed glory, while his thoughts unconsciously breathe the language of the poet.¹²

More seriously, the depth of study accorded to sites varied widely. Castle Acre, a rich Cluniac priory with extensive surviving walls, inspired a series of descriptions in general works such as Henry Harrod's *Gleanings Among the Castles and Convents of Norfolk* (1857) and in a number of more specific considerations.¹³ By contrast, those sites without good architecture were notable for their lack of investigation and Flitcham in Norfolk and Alnesbourne in Suffolk have no antiquarian work relating to them.

For those institutions fortunate enough to receive study, the form undertaken was substantially similar. The documentary evidence was still the source most readily examined, on to which a description of the building groundplan was generally grafted. The work was then illustrated by an engraving of a picturesque view, usually the ruins having some pastoral or domestic scene in the foreground, with a parliament of rooks flapping above (Fig. 1).

This vibrant antiquarian tradition laid the foundations for today's knowledge of East Anglia's monasteries but also demonstrates the remarkably uneven approach of monastic studies. Crucially, the Anglo-Saxon past was all but ignored. Taylor's *Index Monasticus* (1821), gave over only the first two pages of

¹¹ Francis Blomefield's eleven-volume *Essay Towards a Topographical History of Norfolk*, completed by Charles Parkin (1805–10), is of such scope and detail that it frequently remains the starting point for any historical study in the county. Dawson Turner's extra-illustrated volumes are now in the British Library, Add. MSS 23021 and 23024–62. Another set of Blomefield's *Norfolk* with extra illustrations and notes owned by Dawson Turner is today in a private Norfolk collection.

¹² Green, *Bacton*, p. 22. For yet more flowery Norfolk prose see Knights, *Peeps at the Past*.

¹³ Such as Bloom, *Castle and Priory at Castleacre*; Willins, *Castle Acre Priory*, and the anonymous *Handbook to the Ancient Remains . . . at Castleacre* of c.1852.

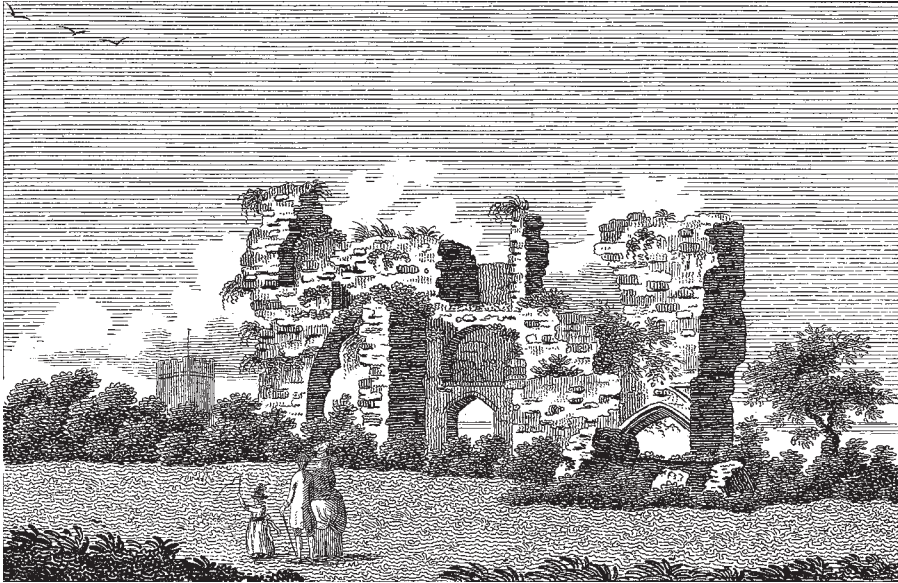


Fig. 1. Blythburgh Priory, Suffolk, from an engraving of c.1780.

his introduction to the four hundred years before the Conquest, and the *Victoria County History* entries by Augustus Jessopp for Norfolk (1906), and by J. C. Cox for Suffolk (1907), devoted only 6 (of 46) and 7 (of 28) pages. Similarly, the gazetteers in all these works list only post-Conquest houses, despite the identification of several Anglo-Saxon religious sites (such as the episcopal *sedes* of *Dommoc* and Elmham, and the monastery of *Cnobheresburg*). Despite the interest of Edmund, East Anglia's martyr king, the investigation of Anglo-Saxon church history was consistently overlooked.¹⁴ The most recent synthesis of monastic houses in Norfolk, Frank Meeres' *'Not of this World'* (2001), has continued to focus exclusively on the post-Conquest period.

MONASTIC EXCAVATIONS FROM THE ANTIQUARIES TO THE PRESENT DAY

The beginnings of monastic excavations in Britain have been described by others, but essentially they agree that investigation was usually basic, stripping away soil to chase walls in narrow trenches and establish building ground-plans.¹⁵ Such excavations enabled a large body of data relating to the structures of the church

¹⁴ An attempt, principally reworking narrative sources into another narrative, is Gallyon, *Early Church in Eastern England*, published as late as 1973. Sadly, it provides little critical analysis of the sources.

¹⁵ See for instance Butler, 'Archaeology of rural monasteries', pp. 8–10 and Coppack, *Abbeys and Priors*, pp. 18–30. These techniques led Patrick Greene in his *Medieval Monasteries*, p. 39, to describe the excavations at Waverley Abbey, Surrey, as appearing 'to anticipate trench warfare; in other [places] it looks like open-cast mining'.

and cloister to be gathered, results being disseminated in publications such as *The Builder* or in local archaeological journals.¹⁶

Although advances in archaeological methodology saw large open-area excavation from the 1960s, much work continued to focus on the church and claustral layout. In his report on excavations at Faversham, Kent, for example, Brian Philp stated:

The excavation aimed at answering three main questions. Had monastic buildings ever stood on the site? If so, to what extent had these buildings survived? Finally, could details of the monastic plan be recovered?¹⁷

This formula, with the primacy of buildings, has remained pervasive in much monastic study and has often been the template for even recent research, Gilchrist commenting 'in keeping with the antiquarian tradition, the aim of much . . . work is the recovery of the monastic plan'.¹⁸ The net result of this orthodoxy or 'minimum requirement' for excavation has been the continued prominence in monastic studies of architectural history, dating and phasing the site's structures.

Sobering as this is, a variety of new approaches has been made, one of the most important being David Robinson's *Geography of Augustinian Settlement* (1980), which chose to view the order's foundations through the lens of historical geography and examine the locational significance of monasteries. More recently Roberta Gilchrist's study of nunneries using gender-archaeological approaches provided an example of post-processual ideas structuring the analysis of monastic life. However, the principal 'new' direction in monastic studies in recent years has been the more processualist investigation of the economic bases of communal existence. With work such as Glyn Coppack's excavation of the possible woolhouse at Fountains Abbey and a large number of papers on water, fish, agriculture and building material exploitation, it has, in a sense, become fashionable for archaeology deliberately to look away from the claustral church. Such themes are explored by contributors to Gilchrist and Mytum's *Archaeology of Rural Monasteries* (1989) and their *Advances in Monastic Archaeology* (1993).¹⁹ The monastery can now be seen as a capitalistic enterprise, whose spiritual aspects if not denied, are often minimised.

Several other biases in modern monastic studies are apparent, notably the continued absence of any detailed archaeological information for most Anglo-Saxon religious communities. This is, in some measure, simply a consequence of the difficulties in identifying such sites, many being undocumented or difficult to

¹⁶ Greene, *Medieval Monasteries*, pp. 206–8, has pointed out that this period also saw many visits to monastic sites by the general public. This interest was served by books such as Ross's *The Ruined Abbeys of Britain* (1882) and the Great Western Railway's book *Abbeys* (1925), that immediately sold out of its 20,000 print run. These books are typical of many, containing ground-plans of the sites and views of the ruins to accompany a potted, document-based, history of the house. In such ways, the aspects perceived as important in monastic research were proclaimed to the public.

¹⁷ Philp, *Excavations at Faversham*, p. 3.

¹⁸ Gilchrist, 'Religious houses of medieval Norfolk', p. 96.

¹⁹ See for instance Bond, 'Monastic water management'; Currie, 'Role of fishponds'; Postles, 'Estimates of harvest'; Senior, 'Selection of ornamental stone types' and Coppack, 'Excavation of an outer court building'. More detailed lists of papers and monographs may be found in the annual *Monastic Research Bulletin*.

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define archaeologically. The debate over the interpretation of sites such as Brandon or Flixborough, which will be examined in the next chapter, means that our appreciation of the material culture of the Anglo-Saxon Church is still undeveloped.

For post-Conquest houses too there is bias. A survey of nationwide work reveals that a large proportion, especially of synthesis, has concerned the Cistercians. Using the table of medieval monastic excavations between 1956 and 1980 compiled by Helen Clarke – a rather crude method as it takes no account of the quality or size of excavation – Cistercian houses received 24.4% of all monastic investigations.²⁰ This is second only to the Benedictine houses (25.6%) which include many cathedrals requiring excavation as a result of modern building modifications and maintenance. The Augustinians, with the largest number of houses in Britain, rate at only 16.8% (an artificially high rating can be seen in other orders with only a small number of houses, because a single excavation will give a correspondingly high percentage). Using the same basis of *Medieval Archaeology*'s annual 'Archaeology in Britain' section, the figures for investigations into monastic houses can be brought up to date for the period 1981–2001. These actually show a fall in the percentage of Cistercian investigations to 13.93% with Benedictine houses at 18.74% and Augustinian houses at 14.98%.²¹ Not only has the Augustinian percentage decreased; it remains only slightly greater than the present Cistercian percentage, despite having nearly three times as many houses (225 against 81).²²

Surprisingly, with the exception of David Robinson's work, the Augustinian movement is very rarely highlighted, despite its large number of houses in Britain. And, while all monastic orders have at least some body of literature surrounding them, the Cistercians appear consistently to hold the high ground in monastic discussion 'although there is little justification for this'.²³ Indeed, such has been the orthodoxy of discussion focussing on the larger orders, Roberta Gilchrist has discussed the military orders as part of 'the other monasticism'.²⁴

This situation is unhelpful for a more inclusive consideration of the foundation

²⁰ Clarke, *Archaeology of Medieval England and Wales*, p. 87.

²¹ The other major orders are Cluniacs 3.04%; Hospitallers 1.87%; Templars 1.41%; Carthusians 1.17%; Premonstratensians 2.34%; Gilbertines 0.47%; Cistercian nunneries 0.35%; Benedictine nunneries 3.98%; Augustinian nunneries 1.52%.

²² The updated figures in fact best reflect modern archaeological practice. The four major orders of friars (Augustinians, Dominicans, Franciscans and Carmelites) have houses which represent nearly a quarter (22.95%) of all monastic investigations between 1981 and 2001, highlighting the urban nature of much contemporary fieldwork. The total rises still further if hospitals, another feature of medieval urban life, are included, to total 31.25%.

²³ Fergusson's review of Stalley's *The Cistercian Monasteries of Ireland*, in the *Burlington Magazine* no. 1019, p. 144. One need only look at publishers' new books lists for further evidence of this bias. Published in the last three years alone one might cite Coppack, *The White Monks*; France, *Cistercians in Medieval Art*; O'Conbhuidhe, *Studies in Irish Cistercian History*; Robinson (ed.), *The Cistercian Abbeys of Britain*; Williams, *The Cistercians in the Early Middle Ages*; Berman, *The Cistercian Evolution*; Piébourg (ed. and transl.), *Le Grand Exorde de Cîteaux*, and Waddell (ed.), *Narrative and Legislative Texts from Early Cîteaux*. This list is far from exhaustive but the point is, I hope, made.

²⁴ Gilchrist, *Contemplation and Action*, pp. 62–105. Another aspect of this 'other monasticism' is, apparently, nunneries, for which see *ibid.*, pp. 106–56 and Gilchrist and Oliva, *Religious Women in Medieval East Anglia*; Oliva, *The Convent and the Community* and Thompson, *Women Religious*.

and life of monasteries. It not only often tends to favour a few large houses (like Fountains or Rievaulx); it ignores the multiplicity of minor monastic orders existing in the landscape, such as the Premonstratensians, Trinitarians, Gilbertines and Bonhommes, often in close proximity to each other and which each had their own influence and resonances within that landscape. Janet Burton's consideration of the Yorkshire monasteries therefore remains something of an exception.²⁵ Understanding the more general place of a monastery in relation to the secular world is therefore much needed. That it has so often not been done is perhaps surprising given the growth of interest in landscape studies by archaeologists in particular, and the development of theoretical approaches to understanding the semiotics of landscape. With this in mind, it seems appropriate to review some of these new landscape approaches which may suggest profitable lines of enquiry for monastic studies.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO LANDSCAPE

An appreciation that the landscape was not simply a passive background for human activities was first made explicit with processualist archaeological theory in the 1960s. This sought to show how environmental conditions either influenced settlement patterns or predicated the type of settlement or activity that might be encountered. More recent theoretical approaches have underlined that in their interaction with the environment, past populations could see and use landscapes actively to carry meaning. Not only can monuments or a built environment be constructed within a landscape, the landscape itself may be created around the monument: 'fundamentally, landscape is a series of spaces which become places, thus establishing territory'.²⁶

As Miller and Tilley have argued, important in this manipulation is the idea that restrictions of access upon or into certain landscapes are concerned with power *over*, rather than *to*, people.²⁷ Landscape can therefore be used to show as well as to symbolise control over people, and to appropriate or demonstrate power and rank in the hierarchy of society.²⁸ Only through the discovery of how the wider landscape physically looked, evolved or was used can deeper questions about the nature of monastic landscapes be addressed. Such questions about the complexity and power residing in the landscape must also recognise the differences in the way contemporary populations may have viewed these landscapes. Barbara Bender has noted how our contemporary western world view 'perceives'

²⁵ Burton, *The Monastic Order in Yorkshire*.

²⁶ Children and Nash, 'Establishing a discourse: the language of landscape', p. 1.

²⁷ Miller and Tilley, 'Ideology, power and prehistory', pp. 5–9.

²⁸ As explored by Tim Phillips using the incidence of chambered cairns in northern Scotland. As he has pointed out, the archaeological interpretation of these meanings has altered over the years as theoretical debates have changed but older, processualist, arguments that monuments frequently concerned territoriality and a legitimisation of rights to resources 'cannot be dismissed just because [they are] unfashionable': Phillips, *Landscapes of the Living, Landscapes of the Dead*, pp. 295–300. For the articulation of symbolism see Daniels and Cosgrove, 'Introduction: Iconography and landscape'.

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landscapes, in which we are the point from which everything is seen.²⁹ The views and experiences of monastic landscapes, however, have every likelihood of having changed from the initial Anglo-Saxon Conversion to the end of the twelfth century. Similarly, the centrality of the Church to medieval life means that its influence (spiritual and political) could be felt in landscapes in ways that it is now hard to appreciate.³⁰ At the heart of this is the way in which landscapes are constructed not just physically, but mentally. In this, the Church was fundamentally important, not only having the landholdings and wealth to manipulate the environment physically but, through its access to literacy, the power to shape the written sources influencing such perceptions.

The dialogue with history

The imbalance in medieval written sources has meant that for all the documentation that does exist, most people of the past remain ‘without’ history, unrepresented in their individuality.³¹ This problem is especially acute with monastic studies because of the bias in the surviving documentary record towards materials generated by religious houses – those same sources that are used to discuss social and political history.³² For instance, Milis has estimated that between the seventh and eleventh centuries in Belgium, monks, representing ‘something like 0.5% of the population, were responsible for from 65% to 98% of the written information’.³³ Many of these earliest records were charters which, because of their survival, have become a fundamentally important document-type in medieval studies. They did more than simply prove title deed to land or privileges, since the very issuing of a charter was an opportunity for a grantor to claim or demonstrate ownership of land by giving it away.³⁴ Charters were highly important social documents in which the signature of witnesses could show fealty to, or approbation of, the grantor. Moreover, grants could be made into highly public occasions, allowing largesse and power to be shown, as seen in the foundation charter of Binham Priory in Norfolk c.1093, witnessed at the altar of the priory by sixty-nine named individuals ‘and others’.³⁵ Giving voice to the experiences of the majority operating below a document-rich, ruling, political class lies at the heart of understanding past society in all its forms. Contextualising the place of the monastery within the landscape provides one potential approach to this problem.

East Anglia presents something of a paradox in its documentary source material, which is decidedly uneven; while there are virtually no contemporary witnesses pre-dating the Norman Conquest (except from Bury St Edmund’s Abbey), the ‘Little’ Domesday survey of 1086 provides the historian with an

²⁹ Bender, ‘Introduction: Landscape – meanings and action’, p. 1.

³⁰ Holtorf, ‘Christian landscapes of pagan monuments’, p. 81.

³¹ Hobsbawn, *On History*, pp. 226–35.

³² Stafford, *Unification and Conquest*, pp. 180–1; Hill, ‘Monastic reform and the secular church’, pp. 115–16.

³³ Milis, *Angelic Monks and Earthly Men*, p. 7.

³⁴ Galbraith, ‘Monastic foundation charters’, p. 214.

³⁵ Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, iii, p. 345 no. I.

abundant source of information, supplemented by the extensive charter collections from Bury St Edmund's Abbey, Norwich Cathedral, and many of the area's monastic foundations.³⁶ A consequence of this imbalance in sources, which are overwhelmingly ecclesiastical in origin, is that where documentary material exists, it has often been seized upon. On occasion this has led to less critical appreciation of other sources, notably the archaeological. This is unfortunate because East Anglia is blessed with an excellent archaeological tradition in which a large number of excavations have been published and in which there is active amateur research participation.

TOWARDS AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF EAST ANGLIA'S MONASTERIES

A number of approaches are made in this book to set the monastic life of the region within its landscape context. Principal among these is an examination of the foundation of monasteries. This not only places all communities on a more equal footing, since in this sense each institution has equal 'value' or 'validity'; it bears on questions of subsequent religious life. One of the enduring features about Christian religious communities was the periodic desire for reform, with a restoration of monastic ideals where they were felt to have slipped. From the religious revival under King Alfred to the coming of the friars, the Anglo-Saxon and Norman Church was to witness many reforms with an increasing number of monastic orders developing from older-established ones.

The decision to patronise these new communities, by whom, when and where, enables a first step to understanding the interaction of houses in the wider secular world. Considerations such as remoteness of site or access to water have often been regarded as important,³⁷ but this is clearly only one aspect to their location and little study has been made of wider settlement trends, questioning whether, indeed, different orders favoured particular land types or topographical situations, and the ways in which these might have changed over time. While the proximity of houses to secular settlement has most often been seen in relation to urban or semi-urban centres, for instance Wymondham Abbey or Norwich Cathedral Priory, lay settlement in rural areas has been less well understood, often having little early documentation and whose Early Medieval size and life-span is usually best understood through archaeological data. East Anglia's good ceramic evidence provides the opportunity for a closer correlation to be made between urban and rural monastic sites.

The second principal theme of this book is the role the past played in the foundation of new monasteries and in particular the importance of Anglo-Saxon religious communities in post-Conquest monastic settlement. While it would be false to exaggerate a division of scholarly investigation into pre- and post-Conquest monasteries, the depth of study that parochial organisation and its physical

³⁶ In the course of total publication in Suffolk as part of the Suffolk Records Society's *Suffolk Charters* series.

³⁷ Coppack, *Abbeys and Priories*, p. 81; Menuge, 'Foundation myth'.

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structures in this overlap period has received stands in contrast to that of contemporary monastic foundation. This needs amendment.

In considering the houses of one region, the actions of founders are also far more easily comparable. This brings the hope that the reasons behind their patronage may similarly be more readily understood. The close siting of castles, symbols of secular authority, and monasteries, has been noted more generally, and obvious examples from the region are Castle Acre and Eye.³⁸ However, the deeper association of monasteries with manorial seats and the landholdings of founders has yet to be fully evaluated. This book aims to address such questions.

Finally, an obvious corollary to all these themes is the symbolism of monastic patronage. Whole foundations, not just the physical elements within them, were figurative; not only was the space within a precinct 'weighted'; the monastery itself acted as a concept as well as an entity, becoming both the medium *and* outcome of social practices, constantly changing.³⁹ Analysis of the monastery within the landscape therefore has the potential to explore the way that the physical environment structures thought and actions. With these considerations in mind, my final concern is to describe the nature and extent of the landscape that will be studied.

EAST ANGLIA: A DEFINITION AND DESCRIPTION

In modern usage, the term East Anglia has come to refer to a region including not only Norfolk and Suffolk but Cambridgeshire (including old Huntingdonshire), Essex and for some, even parts of Northamptonshire and Lincolnshire. In the Anglo-Saxon and Early Medieval periods, East Anglia was more tightly defined. Its chief determinant, its name, dates back to the early eighth century at the latest, when Bede described the occupants of the region as East Angles.⁴⁰ As Anglo-Saxon kingship evolved and more stable political units emerged, East Anglia formed one of the 'heptarchy' of important kingdoms.⁴¹ While the borders seem to have shifted slightly with the tides of political fortune, a regional identity apparently remained substantially intact even following absorption into the West Saxon ('English') kingdom in the tenth century, ultimately becoming manifested in the creation of the medieval diocese of Norwich.

The exact borders of East Anglia are unclear just as they probably were in the centuries of Anglo-Saxon England.⁴² On the basis of Bede's comment that 'Ely is

³⁸ Thompson, 'Associated monasteries and castles in the middle ages'.

³⁹ Parker-Pearson and Richards, 'Ordering the world: Perceptions of architecture', p. 3.

⁴⁰ For instance *HE*, Preface and i, 15. Bede's description of leaders such as Rædwald claiming authority over the East Anglians (*HE*, ii, 5 and 12) pushes the establishment of the kingdom back to at least the mid-seventh century.

⁴¹ David Dumville has argued that we should in fact talk of a 'pentarchy': 'Essex, Middle Anglia and the expansion of Mercia', p. 126. The underlying assumption remains – that East Anglia was a kingdom of a fixed identity. For its earliest rulers see Stenton, 'East Anglian kings of the seventh century'.

⁴² Attempts to define possible borders on the basis of earthworks in this area are fraught with difficulties as most are undated and several 'point into' the county and therefore could not have been erected for the defence of East Anglia. While the Fleam Dyke in Cambridge has had a detailed programme of

a district of about 600 hides in the kingdom of the East Angles'⁴³ we may surmise that the eastern fens should be considered East Anglian, but to the south and west, the Cambridge area seems to have comprised a distinct social and probably political unit.⁴⁴ The southern boundary of the kingdom is as hard to place, and the boundary of the see of Norwich has often been taken to indicate also the limits of the kingdom.⁴⁵ Although this can create a circularity in argument, it is notable that the county immediately south of Suffolk should be that of a rival kingdom, the East Saxons of Essex. Essentially, therefore, East Anglia appears to have covered the modern counties of Norfolk and Suffolk, themselves possibly tribal divisions of the kingdom into north and south 'folk'. It is this area, and its medieval identity as the see of Norwich, which is used as the basic sample area for this book. Because the kingdom as a political unit is central to an appreciation of communal religious life in the region throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, some latitude is necessary. Ely stands in Cambridgeshire, and the tenth-century monastic reform cannot be studied without reference to the other Fenland houses of Thorney, Ramsey and Crowland. Similarly, the see of Norwich included a few villages in Cambridgeshire, two of which had monasteries.⁴⁶ Reference will inevitably be made to sites outside this area, but the context should make clear how influential they might have been. I have preferred to use the term East Anglia, rather than Norfolk and Suffolk, as it conveys something of the political, and vaguely territorial, nature of the area that the term held in the Anglo-Saxon and Early Medieval periods.

The topography of East Anglia

East Anglia's cultural identity was in no small part a consequence of its topographical definition. Bounded by the sea to the north and east, the Fen basin formed a barrier to the west. To the south-west and south lay the less tractable and more densely wooded claylands, with the deep estuaries and river valleys of the Stour forming a final barrier to the south-east, dividing off Suffolk from Essex. Within these limits lay an area with a political homogeneity but a series of distinct regions.

Geology forms the basis for many of these differences, chalk deposits forming the basic solid geology. This has tilted to the south and east so that in the west of Norfolk and Suffolk it forms an escarpment that slopes up to Hunstanton where it reaches 65m OD. To the west of this escarpment is the edge of the Fen basin. As

radiocarbon determinations made, several may in fact date back to the Iron Age: Malim *et al.*, 'New evidence on the Cambridgeshire dykes'; Davies, 'Where eagles dare', pp. 75–7. Fluidity in a border is likely as the East Anglian kings were in competition with Mercia for Middle Anglia until c.654 when Penda killed Anna: Dumville, 'Essex, Middle Anglia and the expansion of Mercia', p. 132. Middle Anglia is itself a difficult area to define but seems to correspond to the modern East Midlands including north Cambridgeshire, south Lincolnshire and Peterborough.

⁴³ *HE*, iv, 19.

⁴⁴ Scull, 'Before Sutton Hoo', pp. 5–6; Hines, 'Anglo-Saxon archaeology of the Cambridge region', p. 144.

⁴⁵ Williamson, *Origins of Norfolk*, p. 83; Warner, *Origins of Suffolk*, pp. 147–8.

⁴⁶ At Isleham and Chippenham.

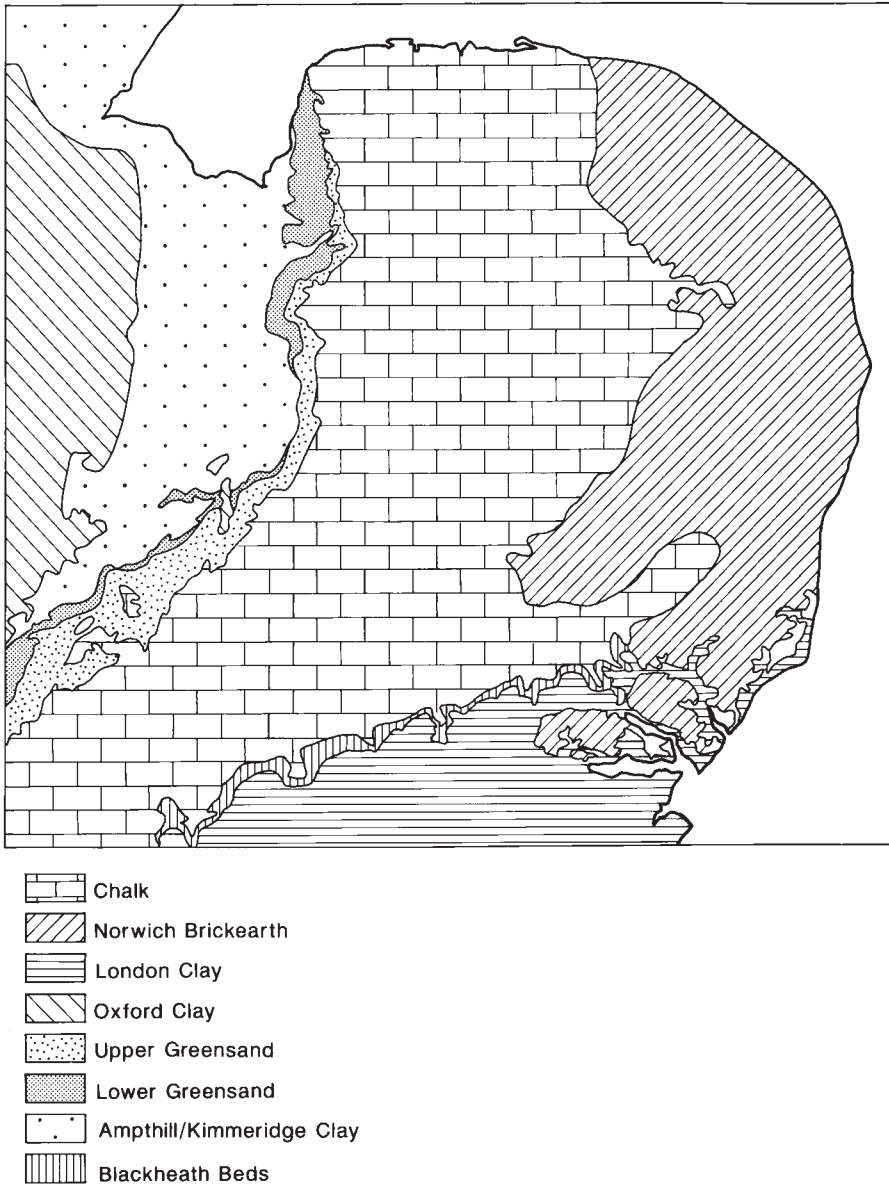


Fig. 2. The underlying solid geology of East Anglia.

the chalk slopes down to the south-east, reaching a depth of about 180m below sea level at Yarmouth, it is covered by Pliocene and Pleistocene gravels, clays and sands known as the Crag, from a north-south line stretching from Weybourne in north Norfolk, through Diss to Ipswich. In turn, these crags are covered with the drift geology of glacial deposits (Fig. 2).

From these, the region can be divided up into its most basic characteristic *pays*

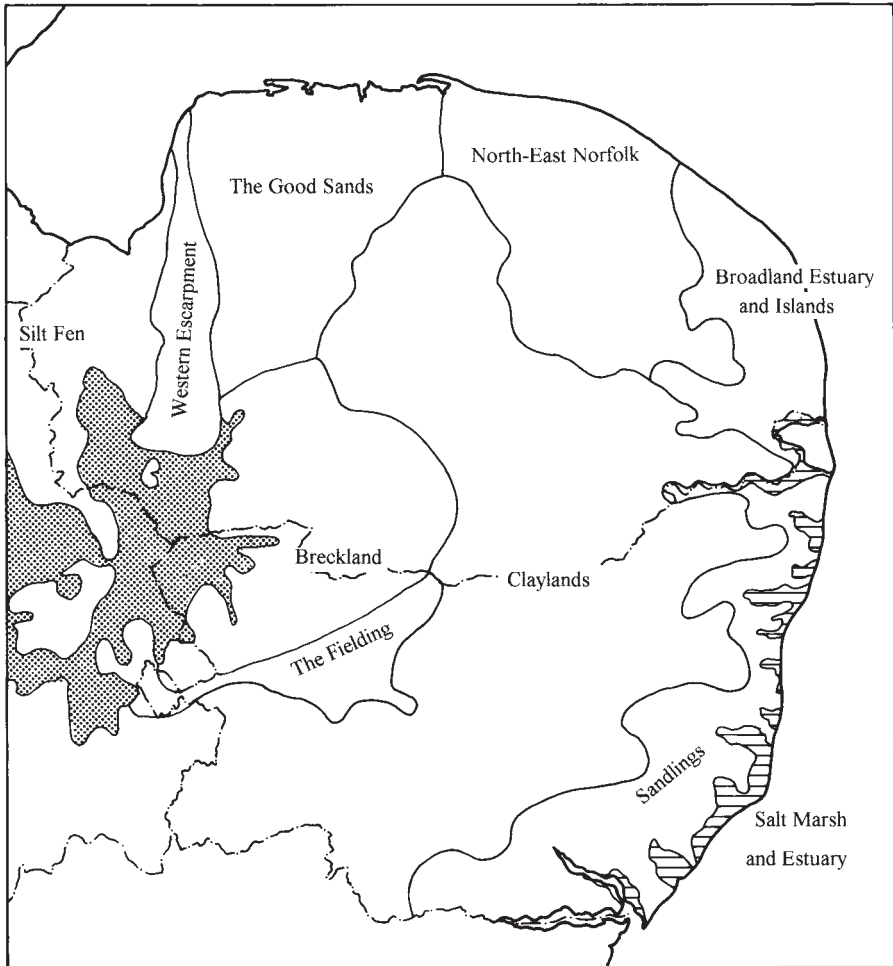


Fig. 3. The landscape *pays* of East Anglia.

(Fig. 3). In the north-west of Norfolk are the 'Good Sands' where sandy soils overlie chalk. To its south, straddling the county boundary, is the so-called Breckland, where acid glacial sand lies upon porous chalk, making for acid, infertile and drought-prone soils. To the west, in Norfolk, lies the escarpment with the Fenland to its west. The Fens are of two distinct types. To the north is the silt fen or 'marshland', and to its south and west, stretching into Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire, the peat fen. South of Breckland in Suffolk is 'The Fielding', again sand soils overlying chalk from which emerge the Lark and Little Ouse river valleys.⁴⁷ To the east of these features lie the central clay uplands that stretch from north Norfolk in an arc through the centre of both counties before drawing away to the south-west of Suffolk into Essex and Hertfordshire. These claylands

⁴⁷ The name is derived from it having been unenclosed until relatively recently, with its open strip fields remaining: Scarfe, *Suffolk Landscape*, p. 27.

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are an important feature in both counties as their water retention makes them less tractable and therefore subject to variable cultivation. Moreover, across this passes what Williamson has called the 'central watershed' in Norfolk, providing a partial barrier to communication with its larger areas of woodland and wood pasture.⁴⁸ This watershed continues in Suffolk, albeit less distinctly. An arc of clayland divides the county into east and west, rising to its highest points at Chedburgh and Depden at up to 140m OD. Perhaps significantly, the traditional divide of the county between East and West Suffolk, although not following the line of the watershed exactly, approximates to it.

Finally, to the east is another series of regions. In north-east Norfolk areas of acid heathland are an occasional aspect of a soil that, for the most part, consists of deep fertile loams, easily tractable, with deep and lush valleys. This gives way to the Broadland area of marsh, previously a great estuary dotted with islands of good loamy soil such as the former island of Flegg. Like the Fens, Broadland can also be divided into two distinct areas. Marshland in the environs of Halvergate and Breydon water (once the open estuary entering the North Sea at the point on which Great Yarmouth now stands) gives way to the river valleys in which are larger areas of undrained fen with reed and sedge beds, in which the 'broads' are actually found. The remaining region which we may identify extends to the south of the Broadland area of north Suffolk and is the Sandlings, best known from the south-east where there were extensive tracts of heathland around Woodbridge and Saxmundham until the Second World War. In fact this landscape once extended further to the north, the sand ending at the sea in cliffs that have endured constant erosion, making incursions from Covehithe and Kessingland, and most famously destroying the medieval town of Dunwich.

These basic divisions of soil type into *pays* do not, of course, represent the controlling factors in settlement and occupation of the landscape, for within this topographical features have always played a prominent part. Rivers, for instance, have cut through the claylands revealing the sandy gravels of the crags, creating more easily cultivated lands. They have, even within the free-draining sandy heathland of south-east Suffolk, created marshlands in river estuaries such as the Blyth, Alde and Deben. Most important for the Anglo-Saxon and medieval periods, they have, with the sea, provided a means of passage and trade, facilitating rather than inhibiting communication.⁴⁹

Settlement in East Anglia

At the outset it seems wise to say something of settlement patterns in the region. Archaeological fieldwork in the last thirty years has shown that by the Middle Anglo-Saxon period (c.650–850) most areas of the region had been settled, including the clay upland areas of Norfolk and Suffolk and much of the silt fen of Norfolk,⁵⁰ although large tracts of land did still remain unexploited. Settlements

⁴⁸ Williamson, *Origins of Norfolk*, p. 19.

⁴⁹ Carver, 'Pre-Viking traffic'.

⁵⁰ Silvester, *Fenland Project 3*, pp. 156–60.

appear to have been larger than their predecessors and often to lie close to the sites of subsequent parish churches. Many tended to occupy valley floor meadow land and the well-drained soils of the boulder clay.⁵¹ Within this increasingly organised landscape, a number of trading sites have begun to be recognised, for instance at Barham and Coddanham in Suffolk and at Bawsey and Caister St Edmund in Norfolk.⁵² Urban development appeared most importantly at Ipswich, a *wic* site whose origins lay under royal control in the seventh century, and at Thetford.⁵³ By the Norman Conquest, East Anglia was the most densely occupied area of England and at Domesday, Norfolk was England's most populous county; 27,000 individuals were listed in the survey, implying a population of some 150,000, with 726 separate villas recorded, and the country's second largest town in Norwich.⁵⁴

There was, of course, fluidity in settlement; fieldwalking has shown the Middle Anglo-Saxon settlements that had appeared across the full width of the silt fen fading to a few more developed villages as water levels began to rise again in the tenth and eleventh centuries.⁵⁵ In the peat fen of Suffolk and Cambridgeshire to the south, settlement of these marshy, watery, areas remained very thin and was probably only partially stimulated because of the holdings of several monasteries there. Elsewhere, there seems to have been a drift of farmsteads away from nucleations to the edges of greens and commons. By c.1200, however, the patterns of settlement were fundamentally those that we still see in the region today.

The landscape of East Anglia is one that is rich and diverse yet all contained within a subtlety of relief which sees little of Norfolk or Suffolk rise more than 60m above sea level. Despite this, Suffolk and Norfolk (contrary to its Noël Coward-inspired images) are emphatically not flat, and this complex interplay of soil types, relief and the presence of water has led to a developed appreciation and utilisation of the differences in height and land-type where they occur. This situation became increasingly refined as population pressure continued, demanding the exploitation of even the less agriculturally appealing areas, for instance the clayland interfluvies of the central uplands of Norfolk. The landscape of these *pays* and their exploitation has therefore had an impact on the population who were to found and settle in religious houses in the region. It is this apparent dichotomy of regional identity in its political sense, with these identities of more specific areas, that constitute an interesting paradox within the religious life of East Anglia.

⁵¹ Williamson, *Origins of Norfolk*, p. 90.

⁵² Newman, 'Wics, trade and the hinterlands', p. 38; Rogerson, 'Six outstanding Middle Anglo-Saxon sites', pp. 112–14; Pestell, 'The afterlife', pp. 124–6 and 130–1.

⁵³ Wade, 'Urbanisation of East Anglia'.

⁵⁴ Williamson, *Origins of Norfolk*, p. 110.

⁵⁵ Hall and Coles, *The Fenland Survey*, pp. 126–7.

CONCLUSION

Monasteries were an integral part of social and religious life in the Anglo-Saxon and medieval worlds, whose contribution to literacy and documentary evidence is well-known. However, much of our knowledge of these periods has been shaped by these same sources, all written for their own specific purposes and it is clear that other sources such as archaeology are needed to supplement our knowledge and create a more rounded picture. While it is no longer acceptable for archaeological questions to be determined simply by historical data, it is foolish to pretend that chronological considerations are unimportant or irrelevant. This book therefore aims to combine both documentary and material evidence without giving either primacy; instead, I hope to show how successfully the two can be integrated. Accordingly, I have used historically defined periods in which to examine material culture and documentary evidence, to refine the setting and our understanding of sites. Nowhere is this interdisciplinary approach more clearly needed than in understanding the first communal religious institutions founded following the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon peoples. It is to the nature and presence of these communities that we must now turn.

Monasticism in Middle Anglo-Saxon East Anglia

ANGLO-SAXON England's earliest monasteries are today known principally through documentary sources. As a result, their location, the type of communities they contained, and the ways in which they operated have been left at the mercy of the surviving source material, of which Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, written c.731, has long been fundamentally important. Against this background, archaeology has tried to develop our knowledge of these sites, initially through the recovery of ground-plans and finds as at Whitby,¹ but increasingly by attempting to characterise 'monastic' archaeological assemblages and topographical characteristics, to create models applicable to other, undocumented, sites.

Despite intensive research that has undoubtedly advanced the field, many questions remain about the various types of institutions within the Church, consisting of episcopal sees, monasteries, hermitages and chapels. Unsurprisingly, differences in emphasis have been expressed and as a flurry of recent review articles has demonstrated there is, as yet, still no consensus of opinion on exactly what model of the early Anglo-Saxon Church best fits our available evidence.²

This chapter will review a number of the paradigms that have been presented by scholars for the early Church's institutions, and will analyse their applicability to East Anglia. Such a study is long overdue for a region with a rich archaeological tradition stemming from its well-established county societies, archaeological units, central museums, and number of important relevant research projects.³ The principal reason is almost certainly East Anglia's extremely sparse documentary evidence. With the exception of a few scraps, historical sources are almost non-existent until the eleventh century.⁴ Archaeologically, however, East Anglia has much to commend its study. The large amount of arable agricultural land in the region has allowed extensive programmes of fieldwalking and aerial

¹ Peers and Radford, 'Saxon monastery of Whitby'.

² Cambridge and Rollason, 'Pastoral organization of the Anglo-Saxon Church'; Rollason, 'Monasteries and society'; Blair, 'Ecclesiastical organization' and 'Palaces or minsters?'; Palliser, '“Minster Hypothesis”: a case-study'; Foot, 'What was an early Anglo-Saxon monastery?'

³ For instance, the Fenland Survey, the Sutton Hoo Research Project and its offshoot, the East Anglian Kingdom Survey, research excavations at Snape, Burrow Hill and Sedgeford as well as the everyday evaluation, rescue excavation and watching brief activities of the county archaeological units.

⁴ The fragility of our records for the area is illustrated by the survival of the episcopal lists of *Dommoc* and *Elmham* only by their insertion into a compilation of Mercian documents c.790.

Monasticism in Middle Anglo-Saxon East Anglia

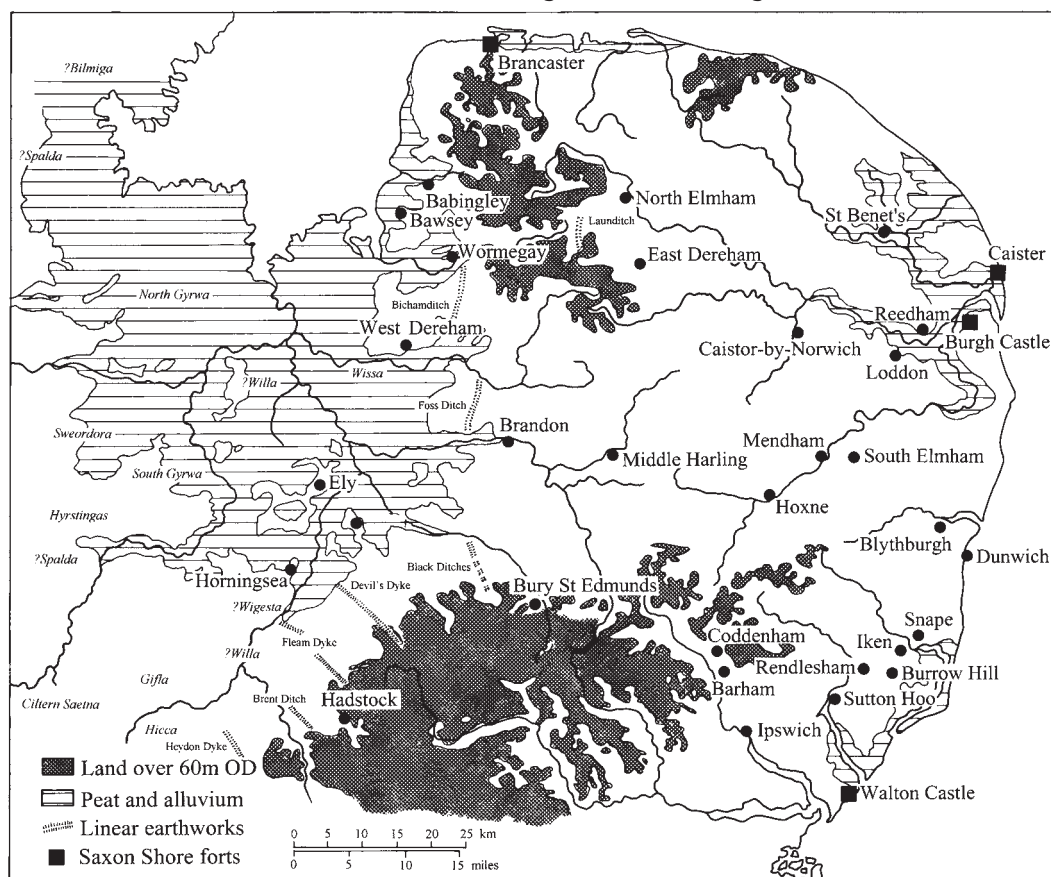


Fig. 4. Middle Anglo-Saxon East Anglia, showing important sites mentioned in the text. Names in *italics* indicate the approximate locations of peoples recorded in the *Tribal Hidage*.

photography, while a positive attitude to metal-detecting by regional archaeologists and museum staff has led to a wealth of information being recorded in the county-based Sites and Monuments Records (SMRs). Finally, and perhaps most important, the robust Ipswich ware pottery in widespread use in East Anglia in this period is both distinctive and survives well in ploughsoil, allowing the identification and dating of settlements. This archaeological background, and East Anglia's ready geographical and political identity (Fig. 4), have made the region central to model-building to hypothesise the nature of early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and kingship.⁵ East Anglia might, therefore, be said to play a crucial role in any rapprochement between textual and material sources in understanding the early Anglo-Saxon Church.

⁵ Scull, 'Before Sutton Hoo'; Carver, 'Kingship and material culture'.

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE PRE-VIKING AGE
SEE OF EAST ANGLIA

The evidence for the earliest religious establishments in East Anglia was discussed by Professor Dorothy Whitelock in a seminal paper some thirty years ago, and while elements of her framework require modification, the overall picture has remained largely unchanged.⁶ Following the uncertain conversion of the East Anglian King Rædwald,⁷ Christianity is accepted as having become established following Sigebert's accession to the throne in 630/631. Felix was appointed the first bishop of the region by Archbishop Honorius, with his see established at *Dommoc* (*HE*, ii, 15). The site of this seat has occasioned much debate, various candidates having been offered by scholars, notably at Dunwich and Walton Castle in Suffolk.⁸ Perhaps the most significant stage in the life of the East Anglian see was its division under Archbishop Theodore c.673, following the infirmity of Bishop Bisi. Thereafter, there were two episcopal sees; one remained at *Dommoc* under Æcci and the other was placed at Elmham under Bedwin. Like *Dommoc*, the location of Elmham has presented difficulties, there being two places with this name, one each in Norfolk (North Elmham) and Suffolk (South Elmham) although it seems most probable that the northern one acted as the new see.⁹ Little is known of either Elmham or *Dommoc* because only very basic episcopal lists survive, ending with Hunberht and Wilred in 845.¹⁰ Indeed, only following the conquest of the Danelaw under the West Saxon kings is the situation in the region understood any more clearly, Bishop Theodred of London administering the single see from at least 926, before the profession of Athulf as Bishop of Elmham 942×956.¹¹

There is documentary evidence for only a few religious communities, those

⁶ Whitelock, 'Pre-Viking Age Church'.

⁷ Rædwald is sometimes said to have apostatised but this means a renunciation of Christianity which does not appear to have happened. Instead, the king appears to have retained an essentially pagan world view: Higham, *The Convert Kings*, p. 103. Most famously, Bede relates how 'he seemed to be serving both Christ and the gods whom he had previously served; in the same temple he had one altar for the Christian sacrifice and another small altar on which to offer victims to devils' (*HE*, ii, 15). For Rædwald see also Keynes, 'Rædwald the Bretwalda'.

⁸ For Walton Castle see Rigold, 'Supposed see of Dunwich' and 'Further evidence'. Dunwich's identification was defended by Whitelock, 'Pre-Viking Age Church', p. 4 and has also been argued for by Haslam, 'Dommoc and Dunwich'. James Campbell has underlined the difficulty in making any identification by pointing out that even Hoxne, Eye or Blythburgh could be seen to have claims: 'East Anglian sees', pp. 4–6. For my own feelings on the location, siding with Rigold's identification with Walton Castle, see my 'Dommoc again', in preparation.

⁹ Whitelock, 'Pre-Viking Age Church', p. 5; Campbell, 'East Anglian sees', pp. 6–8; Williamson, *Origins of Norfolk*, p. 83; Warner, *Origins of Suffolk*, pp. 129–32.

¹⁰ According to the episcopal list given by William of Malmesbury in his *De Gestis Pontificum Anglorum*, ii, 74; Hamilton (ed.), *De Gestis Pontificum Anglorum*, pp. 147–56 at p. 148. For a translation see Preest, *Deeds of the Bishops of England*, pp. 96–7.

¹¹ Theodred's first attestation as bishop occurs in 926 (S 396 and 397), there being an absence of charters between 909–25: Whitelock, 'Some Anglo-Saxon bishops of London', p. 17. For the accession of Athulf see Richter (ed.), *Canterbury Professions*, pp. 25–6 no. 30. Eadwulf, the name given in the profession – more correctly Æthelwulf – first attests as a bishop in a charter of Eadwig to Wilton Abbey (S 582).

mentioned by Bede being restricted to the unidentified *Cnobheresburg* and Ely.¹² Additionally, a letter written by King Ælfwald to St Boniface 742×749 said that masses and prayers were being said for his German mission in all seven of the kingdom's *monasteria*.¹³ With these forming the only contemporary witnesses to religious communities in the region, the sheer dearth of evidence is laid bare, although many more foundations must have been made in this period. The problem lies in evaluating those other sources, which are post-Viking Age in date, and usually twelfth-century or later, whose veracity often cannot be confirmed. Perhaps of more importance is an exploration of exactly what types of community are being studied and what we should call them.

MONASTERIES OR MINSTERS:
THE DIFFICULTIES OF TERMINOLOGY AND DEFINITION

In recent years, historians have come to appreciate the complexity of terminology connected with Anglo-Saxon Christianity, and the possibly diverse types of communities that these represented. The Latin term used most often to describe religious institutions in this period was *monasterium*. Other terms used in contemporary and later sources, frequently co-terminously, were *coenobium* and *ecclesia*.¹⁴ Vernacular texts employed as the equivalent of *monasterium* the Old English loanword *mynster*. Sarah Foot has noted that the various words were apparently all used, to describe all character of institutions, leading to problematic modern usage and definition. She therefore concludes that the best term to use is 'minster', the translation of Old English *mynster*, because this word 'continued to be used in the same way . . . as a direct translation of *monasterium* and with reference to any kind of religious establishment with a church'.¹⁵

Her case has not been universally accepted, and Eric Cambridge and David Rollason have recently argued for more specific meanings to the different terms.¹⁶ They have seen Bede's use of the term *monasterium* as more specific, for instance 'Christ Church is expressly distinguished from the *monasterium* of SS Peter and Paul at Canterbury'.¹⁷ Their contention is that Bede used a more rigid definition of terms to indicate monastic communities living according to a rule of life such as that of St Benedict, compared to groups of clerics living together in loose communities discharging a parochial function. Similarly, they have suggested that another important word used by Bede is *oratorium*, for churches that were more closely associated with episcopal administration.¹⁸ Responding to their argument that simply using the term 'minster' creates a 'lowest common

¹² *HE*, iii, 19 and iv, 19. For the location of *Cnobheresburg* see further below, pp. 56–7.

¹³ Tangl (ed.), *Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, pp. 181–2.

¹⁴ Other words are occasionally used such as *cella* ('cell'), *domus* ((religious) 'house'), and rarely, *locus* ((religious) 'house'), but these are too infrequent to merit further discussion. See Foot, 'Anglo-Saxon minsters', p. 215 and Latham (ed.), *A Revised Medieval Latin Word List*.

¹⁵ Foot, 'Anglo-Saxon minsters', p. 223.

¹⁶ Cambridge and Rollason, 'Pastoral organization of the Anglo-Saxon Church'.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

denominator approach',¹⁹ John Blair has pointed out that distinct episcopal churches co-existed with monasteries, and that Bede used the specific description of *sedes episcopales* to denote the centres of bishops' sees. Similarly, the early Church has sources other than Bede, and the term 'minster' can be used to recognise a wide variety of religious communities of diverse size and character.²⁰

While Blair is surely correct, it is clear that many scholars now speak of 'minsters' to refer to those superior churches that provided pastoral administration to wide *parochiae* in the tenth, eleventh and early twelfth centuries. Given the fundamental changes in communal religious observance in the reformed Benedictine monasteries from the tenth century, a distinction is clear between these institutions and those which some have preferred to call 'mother churches' or 'secular minsters'.²¹ To discuss 'minsters' in a book covering the Middle Anglo-Saxon period too, with its blurred distinction between communities living a more or less coenobitic life, with or perhaps without the provision of wider pastoral care, it seems unwise to use the same term for both earlier and later periods. I have therefore chosen to follow the most common usage of the original sources, and use the term *monasteria* to describe all those earliest categories of religious establishment. This at least preserves the more widespread confusions, meanings and resonances known to its original users, as well as the suggestions of monastic life and of the more secular communities which are today identified with the loanword *minster*.

INTERPRETATIONS OF *MONASTERIA* AND APPROACHES TO THEIR IDENTIFICATION

Monasteria and their activities are known principally from the documentary record, usually as royal or aristocratic foundations. They allowed individuals to express their religious devotion, in addition to providing spiritual benefits for the founders through the prayers of inmates. All clerics in *monasteria* followed a communal life in some measure, but the way that these groups chose to live could vary widely. The Rule that originated with Benedict of Nursia's community at Monte Cassino c.534 came to England with Augustine's mission in 597, and became disseminated among Anglo-Saxon religious communities.²² Although the Rule provided a model for communal life, alternative Rules also existed and there was no regulation of *monasteria* to ensure either adherence to Benedict's precepts, or to prevent the use of other customs.²³ Consequently, early Anglo-Saxon Christianity was truly a broad church in which membership of a

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

²⁰ Blair, 'Ecclesiastical organization', pp. 195–6.

²¹ Hase, 'Mother churches of Hampshire'; Cambridge, 'Early Church in County Durham', p. 66.

²² For editions of the Rule see Butler (ed.), *S. Benedicti Regula Monasteriorum* and Linderbauer (ed.), *S. Benedicti Regula Monasteriorum*. A translation is Gasquet, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*.

²³ Burton, *Monastic and Religious Orders in Britain*, p. 1. This diversity can be seen in Benedict's own rules, in which he criticises the groups of monks he characterises as 'Sarabites' who recognise no Rule: 'What they say and choose, that they call holy; what does not suit them, they regard as forbidden': Braunfels, *Monasteries of Western Europe*, p. 27.

monasterium could mean different ways of life in different places. One of the most important obligations was the provision of a range of pastoral services to the local lay community, which could include baptism, communion and burial. Through them, few religious establishments could be said to be truly cut off from the secular world. This diversity of Anglo-Saxon religious life, and our awkward and limited archaeological datasets, was pointed out by Rosemary Cramp twenty-five years ago. It has continued to make for difficulties in the definition of these early Anglo-Saxon institutions by scholars. However, on the basis that the Church and monasticism gave new scope to the arts and intellectual thought in contemporary society, scholars have pursued the possibilities offered by archaeological correlates, and what this might tell us about the relationship of religious institutions and secular society in Middle Anglo-Saxon England.²⁴

For Eric Cambridge, when using the word *monasterium*, Bede probably used it ‘consistently, to mean “monastery” in the strict sense’.²⁵ His examination of the early Church in County Durham has attempted to locate former *monasteria* using early standing churches and non-architectural Anglian sculpture as material correlates of ‘sites which are documented as monastic’.²⁶ The locations of similar sculpture or churches were taken to indicate the former presence of monastic dependencies whose location has otherwise been lost, their distribution forming clusters interpreted as representing the estates of *monasteria*. Their avoidance of wider Anglian settlement patterns was taken as affirmation of their monastic nature, the sculpture and church remains therefore amounting to a distinctive form of material culture relating only to ‘monastic’ sites. More recently, his work with David Rollason has suggested that a parallel system of non-monastic churches also existed, discharging parochial functions under the aegis of the episcopate. There has been no suggestion as to what these ‘secular’ church communities may have looked like, or what distinctive forms of material culture (if any) they may have had.

Cambridge’s work is superficially attractive but relies upon the evidence of Bede as representative of what monasticism meant to the Anglo-Saxons. This is a dangerous premise; Bede not only lived in a community run along stricter Benedictine precepts than many, he had a fundamentalist Benedictine political agenda.²⁷ Similarly, the model proposed by Cambridge and Rollason ignores a wider parochial role for ‘dependencies’, while Cambridge’s early dating of many churches leads to a questionable assertion that only ‘monastic’ churches were built of stone before the eleventh century.²⁸

There are three major drawbacks to using Cambridge’s model in an East Anglian context. First, there are very few instances of either architectural or

²⁴ Cramp, ‘Monastic sites’, p. 203.

²⁵ Cambridge, ‘Early Church in County Durham’, p. 71.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

²⁷ Higham, *An English Empire*, pp. 9–18.

²⁸ Cambridge and Rollason, ‘Pastoral organization of the Anglo-Saxon Church’, *passim*; Cambridge, ‘Early Church in County Durham’, p. 81. For more general discussions of Anglo-Saxon architectural development see Taylor and Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture* and Fernie, *Architecture of the Anglo-Saxons*.

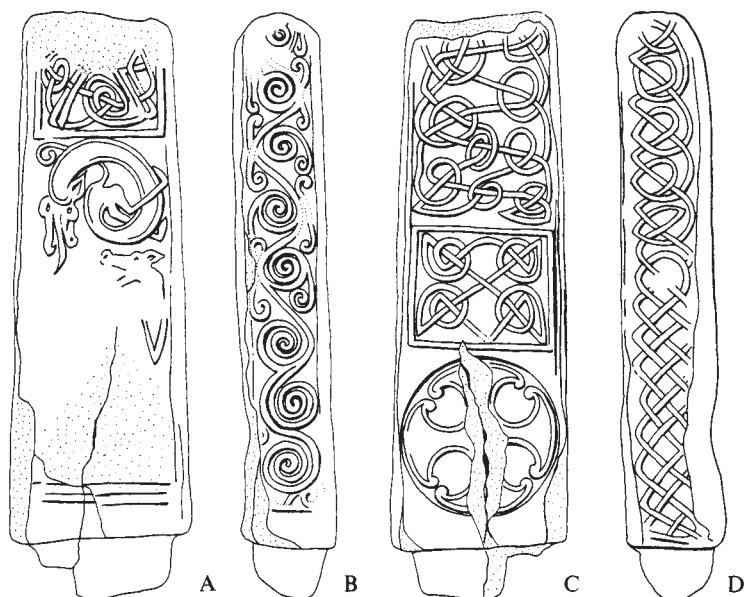


Fig. 5. The Iken cross shaft, as extant. Scale 1:20. (By kind permission of Stanley West.)

non-architectural worked stone in the region until the eleventh century, so although significant finds, they cannot be used as common material correlates of *monasteria*. East Anglia is largely devoid of freestone, the local building stone being flint. Perhaps not surprisingly, it has only three pieces of sculptured stone from the Middle Anglo-Saxon period; the 'Ovin' cross base from Haddenham near Ely, a second sculpture in Ely and the cross-shaft from Iken in Suffolk (Fig. 5).²⁹ The Haddenham base is probably of late seventh-century date, undecorated except for an inscription in Roman capitals. It records the cross as being the gift of Ovin, who has been identified, improbably, with a figure of that name described in the twelfth-century *Liber Eliensis* as a steward of Saint Æthelthryth (*LE*, i, 8).³⁰ The cross was rescued by Ely Cathedral's great historian James Bentham (1708–94) from nearby Haddenham where it was being used as a horse-mounting block. The second Ely fragment is possibly of eighth-century date, built into the chapel of St John's Hospital, Ely, apparently representing an animal with a man on its back.³¹ It is in a secondary context (the wall is thirteenth-century), and its

²⁹ A case has been made for two stones from the bishop's throne in Norwich Cathedral to pre-date the Viking incursions: Whittingham, 'Norwich Saxon throne'. However, given the extreme damage to the stones' decoration, his attempt at a stylistic dating is unconvincing. Similarly, Radford's discussion, 'Bishop's throne in Norwich Cathedral', is overly simplistic. For instance, he states that the stone fragments 'were damaged by fire, probably in the course of the Danish conquest of East Anglia about 870. The subsequent weathering occurred during the period when the see was in abeyance and the church stood derelict' (p. 120).

³⁰ Okasha, *A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Non-Runic Inscriptions*, pp. 74–5, sees the date as uncertain but the script as probably later than seventh century in date.

³¹ Cobbett, 'A Saxon carving found at Ely'.

original location is uncertain, although it is presumably to be associated with the *monasterium*.

Finally, the Iken cross-shaft is unique in the East Anglian heartlands which lack the freestone more easily available in the Ely area. Iken is probably to be identified with the named *monasterium* of *Icanho* which appears in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* s.a. 654: 'In this year King Anna was slain, and Botwulf began to build the *myenster* at *Icanho*.'³² Little archaeological evidence other than the cross-shaft has been found at Iken. Limited excavation within the medieval parish church did recover three sherds of Ipswich ware pottery, indicating some other Middle Anglo-Saxon occupation on the site, but there was no clear evidence for an earlier church of that date.³³ However, the place-name evidence linking the site to that recorded is strong: the Old English *hōh/hō* element (meaning a heel or spur of land) corresponds well to the dramatic peninsula site upon which the modern church of Iken stands (Frontispiece).³⁴ This, the church's dedication to St Botolph, and the fact that Iken seems to have once formed part of the royal manor of Sudbourne, suggest at least a place formerly of some importance.³⁵ The cross-shaft has a 'muddling of motifs' and seems to derive from the Mercian school of sculpture, dating to c.850–900.³⁶

These instances might all be said to fit Cambridge's model, but the absence of further examples from the entire region demonstrates its lack of applicability. Similarly, the earliest surviving stone buildings in East Anglia, secular or religious, appear to date from only the eleventh century onwards.³⁷ Finally, the vagaries of the Anglo-Saxon documentary record give us no unquestionably 'monastic' sites to examine for distinctive elements of material culture. While

³² Garmonsway (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, pp. 28–9.

³³ West *et al.*, 'Iken, Botolph and the coming of East Anglian Christianity', p. 288.

³⁴ Gelling and Cole, *The Landscape of Place-Names*, pp. 186–90.

³⁵ There is, in addition, the claim of the early twelfth-century Ely document *Libellus Æthelwoldi episcopi*, translated into Latin 1109×1131 from a late tenth-century Old English original: 'King Edgar and Ælfthryth gave St Æthelwold an estate called Sudbourne, together with the charter for the land, which Earl Scule had once held, on condition that he translate the Rule of St Benedict from Latin into English. He did this. Then the blessed Æthelwold gave this land with its charter to St Æthelthryth'; *Libellus* §49, copied into *Liber Eliensis*, ii, 37, Keynes and Kennedy (eds and transl.), *Book of Bishop Æthelwold*, forthcoming; Blake (ed.), *Liber Eliensis*, p. 111. This claim appears to have led to the inclusion of Sudbourne, along with many other manors, in a forged confirmation charter of Edward the Confessor, S 1051. From *Liber Eliensis* (1169×1174), based on the *Libellus*, it is implied that Sudbourne was closely connected with the five and a half hundreds of Wicklaw, although this is unclear from Domesday Book. Iken, however, appears to have disappeared from view: in Domesday it is not mentioned, Sudbourne instead being rated as an Ely estate of six carucates (*LDB*, fol. 384a), with one church and eight acres. Also in Sudbourne was another far smaller holding, of Gilbert de Wissant, held of Robert Malet, which included a church with sixteen acres and the unusually high valuation (for Suffolk) of 2s (*LDB*, fol. 316b). That this was probably Iken church is suggested by the gift of the church of St Botolph Yca by William de Roville to Robert Malet's new monastery of Eye, founded 1086×1087; Brown (ed.), *Eye Priory Cartulary*, nos 1 and 15. See also Stevenson, 'St Botolph (Botwulf) and Iken'. The claims of Warwick Rodwell for *Icanho* to have been at Hadstock church in Essex may be disregarded: Rodwell, 'Archaeological investigation of Hadstock church', pp. 67–9; Martin, 'St Botolph and Hadstock'. This church is instead far more probably the memorial church erected by Cnut at *Assandun*. See further pp. 116–18 and n. 81.

³⁶ West *et al.*, 'Iken, Botolph and the coming', p. 292; Plunkett, 'Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture', pp. 328 and 344–5.

³⁷ Heywood, 'Minor church building'; Fernie, *Architecture of the Anglo-Saxons*.

Cambridge's work raises interesting questions for the structure and workings of *monasteria*, it is based largely on an area atypical of much of England.

Different approaches have been made to locate *monasteria* through material correlates elsewhere, for instance in south-west England. In North Devon Susan Pearce has studied sixth-century monumental inscribed stone memorials, related to the estates of 'a stratified and organized society'.³⁸ Along with early Christian graveyards, identified by their circular enclosing banks, these estates were suggested as having been maintained into the Anglo-Saxon period, the gift of one estate in its entirety and much of another to two *monasteria*, emphasising for her the influence land divisions had on the subsequent identification and reconstruction of *parochiae*. More recently, Teresa Hall's investigation of *monasteria* in Dorset uses a system of weighting certain features as more likely to have been found in a church originating as a Middle Anglo-Saxon *monasterium*.³⁹ There are difficulties with such a system,⁴⁰ notably the ways in which such institutions were able to develop naturally and did not necessarily share certain, set, characteristics. Equally, her analysis of the wider *parochiae* to these churches emphasises how dangerous it can be to associate later boundaries with early ones, and the difficulty in identifying a continuity between early estates with those of the Middle Anglo-Saxon period. In particular, she concludes that there is no significant correlation between sites with Roman villas and *monasteria*.

These approaches, made in a region for which greater continuity generally appears to have existed between the sub-Roman and Middle Anglo-Saxon periods, serve only to emphasise the difficulties involved in the application of such models to East Anglia. Not only does the eastern region lack named stones to indicate a sub-Roman elite, no early Christian cemeteries are identifiable on morphological grounds. Indeed, even where ordered co-axial field systems of pre-Roman date surviving within the landscape have been recognised, for example those between Scole and Dickleburgh on the Norfolk-Suffolk border, subsequent parish boundaries frequently demonstrate a lack of continuity by meandering across the field system in apparently jumbled and disorderly ways.⁴¹ Any attempt to build upon the sub-Roman landscape is thus fraught with difficulty in East Anglia. Continuity has been argued for in some areas, for instance Icklingham in Suffolk,⁴² but on the evidence of grave-goods in Migration-period folk cemeteries like Morning Thorpe, Bergh Apton and Spong Hill in Norfolk there appears to have been only limited social stratification explicit in the new dominant culture until the mid-sixth century.⁴³ Similarly, there is no documentary

³⁸ Pearce, 'Early church in the landscape', p. 258.

³⁹ Hall, *Minster Churches in the Dorset Landscape*.

⁴⁰ As noted by Patrick Hase in his review of Hall (*Medieval Archaeology* 45 (2001), pp. 396–7).

⁴¹ Williamson, 'Parish boundaries and early fields', p. 247 and his 'Scole-Dickleburgh field system revisited'.

⁴² Scarfe, 'Place-name Icklingham'. See also Rippon, 'Landscapes in transition'.

⁴³ Green *et al.*, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Morning Thorpe*; Green and Rogerson, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Bergh Apton*. For the inhumations recovered at Spong Hill see Hills *et al.*, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Spong Hill, North Elmham Part III*. For discussions on social stratification in Migration Period cemeteries see Welch, *Anglo-Saxon England* at pp. 71–96 and Lucy, *The Anglo-Saxon Way of Death*.

evidence to confirm the existence of landscape patterns before the eleventh century, making the antiquity of any posited estates difficult to prove. Nevertheless, of importance in both approaches is the identification of large estates which provided the subsequent area identifiable as a church's *parochia*. Ultimately, this work draws upon the research of landscape archaeologists and historical geographers, notably Glanville Jones, which has shown the widespread presence, across Britain, of large territorial units of organisation with distinctive social organisations in which access to land and resources was controlled by a central authority to which renders were paid.⁴⁴ Despite some criticism, this 'multiple-estate' model has been generally accepted by scholars, and provides a suitable mechanism for understanding land exploitation and control in the Middle Anglo-Saxon period. Its understanding and identification therefore represent one of the attributes which might be expected as supporting evidence of the location of *monasteria* within East Anglia.

This more general approach of site characterisation is one which has been exemplified in the work of John Blair, the modern-day doyen of 'minster' studies and whose work has had a profound influence upon the study of these early Anglo-Saxon churches. Blair's approach has been not so much based on a single model of development as on identifying features typical of *monasteria*. These form four main categories. First is the use of curvilinear structures to enclose sites, following the work of Rosemary Cramp, who saw the *vallum monasterii* as 'an essential element of the insular monastic sites'.⁴⁵ Second is the reuse of Roman structures by *monasteria*, an aspect of Anglo-Saxon planning which represents 'a thorny question'.⁴⁶ Third is the axial alignment of buildings in many *monasteria*, usually concentrating on the churches in a complex, and fourth, the significance of having at least two churches on a site.⁴⁷

The value of Blair's work is that it presents a range of features which might suggest the presence of a *monasterium*; the difficulty is that the identification of many attributes as unique to *monasteria* remains problematic. Because Blair's work has been so influential and appears to present better bases from which to identify the largely undocumented *monasteria* of East Anglia, his arguments need detailed consideration in relation to the region's material. On material culture bases alone, identification has usually been made through the presence of 'prestige metalwork' such as coinage, dress accoutrements and styli, or sites with large amounts of Ipswich ware-type pottery and sherds of imported Continental types. If it is possible to identify *monasteria* on the basis of distinctive artefact types, these categories must all be examined.

⁴⁴ Jones, 'Multiple estates and early settlement' and 'Multiple estates perceived'. For a critique see Gregson, 'Multiple estate model'.

⁴⁵ Cramp, 'Monastic sites', p. 204.

⁴⁶ Blair, 'Anglo-Saxon minsters: a topographical review', p. 225.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

IPSWICH WARE POTTERY

In itself the presence of pottery cannot be used to identify sites as monastic (unless, perhaps, certain ceramics could be proven to have a specific, unique, liturgical function). Nevertheless, pottery remains of central importance to the archaeologist in giving a readily datable indication of a site's occupation. For the Middle Anglo-Saxon period, few regions are as fortunate as East Anglia, where a local pottery type, Ipswich ware, became so widespread in its use that it has become a marker for Middle Anglo-Saxon settlement. Taking its name from its only (known) place of production, Ipswich ware departed from earlier, friable, pottery traditions, being made on a turn-table and fired to a high temperature in kilns (Fig. 6). The resultant harder fabric survives well in all soil types, is more resistant to taphonomic processes such as plough-damage and weathering, and has been recovered in large quantities in excavation and fieldwalking. A recent project dedicated to the pottery has suggested Ipswich ware production began c.720, soon after Ipswich emerged as the *emporium* of the kingdom of East Anglia.⁴⁸ This start date is still far from clear but is not contradicted by the lack of Ipswich ware from the final phase of accompanied burials in the region. Similarly, on the basis of fieldwalking and evaluation trenches, the early 'productive' site at Coddendam in Suffolk does not appear to have any Ipswich ware, yet finishes with primary *sceatta* coins of c.690–700.⁴⁹

Within East Anglia, the pottery has a widespread distribution with over 570 findspots occurring in Norfolk alone.⁵⁰ Although Ipswich ware is found outside the region on a number of sites, as a result of the intensive fieldwalking programme undertaken in the recent Fenland Project, a rapid drop in concentration has been observed to the west of the River Nene (Fig. 7). Instead, pottery of a comparable date is represented by the shelly ceramics generically called Maxey ware. Equally, Maxey-type pottery does not, with the exception of a site at Walton Ingleborough, penetrate into the Norfolk marshland, potentially indicating

an economic boundary. More than this, it might perhaps mark a political border as well, in which case the tribal boundary of Middle Saxon East Anglia would be by far the most likely candidate.⁵¹

If this is the case, the role of the emergent kings in the control of commodities within trade and exchange may be indicated. Unfortunately, the general presence of Ipswich ware, and the difficulty in categorising its various products into tighter chronological ranges, means that the available data are not always easy to

⁴⁸ Blinkhorn, 'Of cabbages and kings', pp. 8–10 and *The Ipswich Ware Project*, forthcoming. Blinkhorn's work builds upon that of Hurst and West, 'An account of Middle Saxon Ipswich ware'.

⁴⁹ For Coddendam see Newman, 'Exceptional finds, exceptional sites?', pp. 103–6. Since that paper was written, trial trenching by the Suffolk Archaeological Unit has revealed Coddendam to have settlement evidence with post-built structures and a range of pottery fabrics – but no Ipswich ware. I am grateful to John Newman for this information.

⁵⁰ Rogerson, 'Rural settlement c.400–1200', p. 60.

⁵¹ Silvester, 'The addition', p. 28.

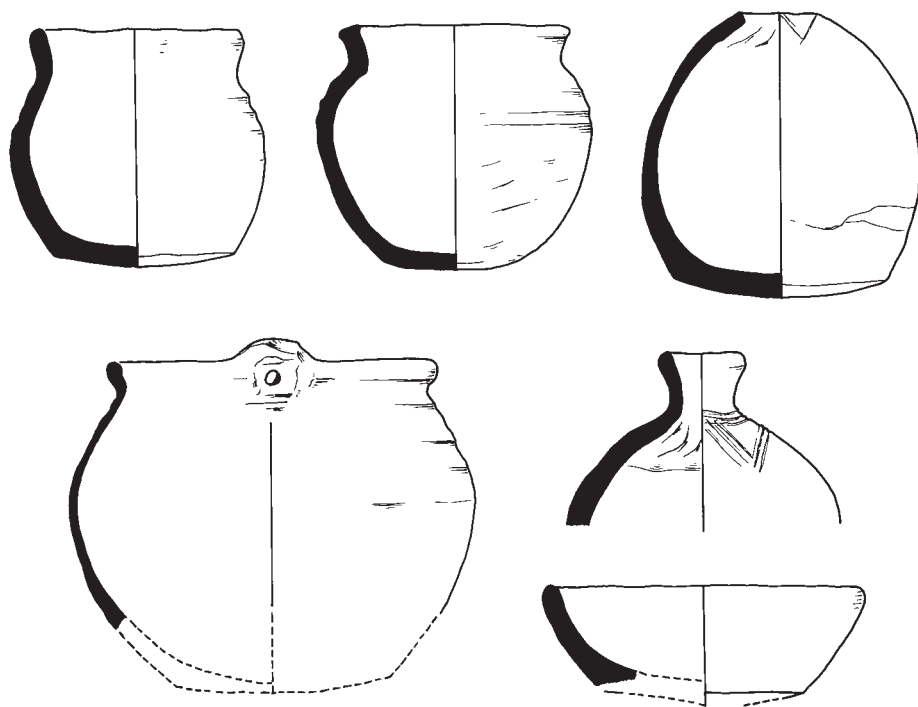


Fig. 6. Examples of Ipswich ware pottery. Scale 1:4. (After Hurst, 'The pottery'.)

interrogate. For instance, in its earliest period of production, Ipswich ware may have been more expensive, prestigious and therefore available only to settlements of higher social status, such as *monasteria*. Since this cannot be proven, pursuing such speculation is futile. Of more importance is the suggestion that large spreads or concentrations of Ipswich ware pottery must represent occupation practices distinct from those yielding only a thin scatter.

In his intensive fieldwalking of 134 square kilometres of land for the East Anglian Kingdom Survey, John Newman discovered fifteen sites of Middle Anglo-Saxon date. Their different sizes allowed the proposal of a settlement hierarchy, an average site of 1–3 hectares being placed below examples of up to 5–6 hectares in size. Finally, one site in the area stood out above all the others, covering an extensive 15 hectares, placing it at the head of the hierarchy. The fact that the site happens to be at Rendlesham, a *villa regia* of the East Anglian kings according to Bede (*HE*, iii, 22), supports the model and suggests that dense scatters of pottery may indeed correlate with important centres.⁵²

More generally, this reflects the presence of early multiple estates of the sort

⁵² Newman, 'Late Roman and Anglo-Saxon settlement patterns'. A possible contradiction is the small number of sherds discovered during excavations at North Elmham in Norfolk. This might suggest that large settlements could have small quantities of pottery, perhaps indicating an aceramic phase. However, the sparse Middle Anglo-Saxon features provided poor evidence that this settlement was as large as had been assumed. See Wade-Martins, *Excavations in North Elmham Park*, figs 2.4 and 2.5.



Fig. 7. The distribution of Ipswich ware pottery findspots in England (after Blinkhorn, 'Of cabbages and kings').

proposed by Glanville Jones in which, by the Middle Anglo-Saxon period, large economic units utilised smaller ones. The latter sometimes had specialist functions and may have been identified through their small spreads of Ipswich ware. According to the same estate model, these units gradually disintegrated into more independent foci, a process of fission creating individual villas that became the basis of the modern parochial network. This appears to find expression in the increased amount and extent of Later Anglo-Saxon pottery, Thetford ware, seen on many sites with Ipswich ware. At the same time, the centres of some estates are potentially marked out by the density of their pottery scatters. While those sites with large concentrations of Ipswich ware may invite identification as important settlement centres, this cannot distinguish whether they are secular or religious in nature.

One final aspect needs at least brief discussion, that of imported Continental pottery. Such pottery is found relatively rarely on rural Anglo-Saxon sites and

always in small quantities.⁵³ Imports have been found on a number of documented *monasteria*, for example North French wares from Castor, Northants,⁵⁴ but again it cannot be said to have any specific liturgical function. Instead, imported pottery simply demonstrates the access a site's occupants had to Continental trade networks, which in turn may indicate the above average status of such concerns. They cannot, however, be used as a material correlate of *monasteria*.

If pottery provides a useful first indication of the location of a Middle Anglo-Saxon site in the region, and some idea of its status, more obvious classes of material culture indicating unusual or above average settlements have increasingly been found, mainly as a result of the increased use of metal-detectors.

‘PRODUCTIVE’ SITES

The term ‘productive’ site is relatively new, having been originated by numismatists to describe locations yielding concentrations of early coinage.⁵⁵ The term has been less welcomed by some archaeologists who argue that such a blanket term should not be applied to sites that may have had very different functions, simply because they have yielded large finds assemblages. This functional variability lies at the heart of identifying sites as *monasteria*, but as a shorthand term to discuss places of a certain nature, requiring more detailed investigation, ‘productive’ site seems as useful a term as any.⁵⁶

Although ‘productive’ sites have been identified principally through the metal-detection of objects, a number of apparently similar character have been excavated, most notably Flixborough in Humberside and in East Anglia, Brandon in Suffolk.⁵⁷ The most pressing problem is the lack of any integrated approach to the East Anglian sites, only a few having received any follow-up work, notably Bawsey (Plate 2) which has had limited topographical evaluation and, following a visit from television's *Time Team* programme, a geophysical survey of the hilltop site.⁵⁸

The difficulty in successfully interpreting ‘productive’ sites rests on understanding the relationship between recovered finds and the wider archaeology. For

⁵³ There is an expanding number of Continental sherds now known in Norfolk, but the majority are unpublished (Andrew Rogerson pers. comm.). For an exception, from a Roman site, see Hodges, ‘An unusual ?Tating-ware vessel’. For a discussion of pottery imports from urban contexts see Blackmore and Redknap, ‘Saxon and Early Medieval imports’.

⁵⁴ Hurst, ‘The pottery’, pp. 311–12.

⁵⁵ Leahy, ‘Middle Anglo-Saxon metalwork from South Newbald’, p. 51.

⁵⁶ For a discussion of the problem and approaches to various sites, ‘productive’ or otherwise, see Pestell and Ulmschneider (eds), *Markets in Early Medieval Europe*, *passim*.

⁵⁷ Both sites are unpublished but have interim statements. For Flixborough see Loveluck, ‘A high status Anglo-Saxon settlement’ and ‘Wealth, waste and conspicuous consumption’; for Brandon see Carr *et al.*, ‘Middle Saxon settlement at Staunch Meadow’, Murphy, ‘Anglo-Saxon landscape and rural economy’, pp. 31–5 and Sims, ‘Middle Saxon settlement at Staunch Meadow’.

⁵⁸ Approaches to evaluating these East Anglian sites have been made by Newman, ‘Wics, trade and the hinterlands’ and ‘Exceptional finds, exceptional sites’; Rogerson, ‘Six outstanding sites’ and Pestell, ‘The afterlife’. The only report of *Time Team*'s work at Bawsey is in a popular account, Taylor's *Time Team* 99, pp. 66–73. For Bawsey church see also Batcock, *The Ruined and Disused Churches of Norfolk*, pp. 114–16.



Plate 2. The hilltop 'productive' site of Bawsey from the north-west, taken 17 July 1989. The Norman parish church of St James stands at the highest point of the hill and, like the majority of the Anglo-Saxon metalwork recovered from the site, is contained within a large ditched enclosure of indeterminate date. Photograph: D. A. Edwards/ copyright Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service.

instance, it is clear that the level of 'productivity' can vary, the site at Bidford-on-Avon being

not as 'productive' as some of the 'productive sites' in East Anglia . . . [although] the site at Bidford does represent an exceptionally high concentration of Middle Saxon finds in a Warwickshire context.⁵⁹

This question of variability in size, and exactly how one chooses to identify one site as 'productive' and not another, has made this strand of archaeological evidence difficult to use. For some scholars like Julian Richards, the entire phenomenon of the 'productive' site is in fact a mirage caused by the erosion and dispersal of archaeological artefacts within the ploughsoil from perfectly normal rural settlements.⁶⁰ This interpretation does not appear convincing. In East Anglia, where close liaison between archaeologists and metal-detectorists has allowed the plotting and recording of archaeological finds for the last twenty-five years, definite trends in the quantity and quality of Middle Anglo-Saxon finds can

⁵⁹ Wise and Seaby, 'Finds from a new "productive site"', p. 60.

⁶⁰ Richards, 'What's so special about "productive" sites?' and 'When does the term "productive" '.

be seen from a number of sites, for instance Wormegay and Bawsey in Norfolk, and Barham and Coddanham in Suffolk. Similarly, the bias in metal-detection coverage suggests that many other sites might still remain undiscovered or be only partially appreciated; the location of rich sites inevitably brings increased detection, and with it a disproportionately higher number of finds.⁶¹

The reason that some 'productive' sites have been interpreted as *monasteria* relates directly to the quantity and quality of the metalwork which they have yielded, which falls into three main categories: coinage, dress accessories and artefacts with religious connotations. Such finds have all been recovered at documented *monasteria* like Whitby.⁶² Coinage might appear a rather worldly class of find to expect on a religious site, especially one in which inmates might have chosen to withdraw from the secular world. However, the wealth of many *monasteria*, through land endowments and the granting of markets and other privileges such as tolls, ensured they had an intimate relationship with commercial activities and were for some an active catalyst for trade.⁶³ The prolific numbers of seventh- and eighth-century *sceatta* coins recovered from most 'productive' sites represent high monetary values, and their concentration clearly indicates either centralised production or control of resources involved in exchange in a proto-monetary society.⁶⁴ As central places with estates, *monasteria* might therefore be expected to have evidence for this commercial facet and indeed a large amount of coinage was found at Whitby.⁶⁵ Coinage cannot, though, be divorced from the expanding commercial world which royal coin issues show was being increasingly controlled by the state, and in which *emporia* such as *Hamwic* clearly show a level of planning and centralised authority, designed to stimulate trade.⁶⁶

Like coins, the dress accessories from many 'productive' sites indicate the status of the occupants. Flixborough in Humberside is the classic example of this, having yielded over 600 dress pins, while Brandon has 234 pins.⁶⁷ It is not simply the quantity of pins that stand out, but often the quality, gilt copper-alloy items jostling with objects of gold or silver. Of more importance in the present

⁶¹ For the difficulty in interpreting metal-detected finds see Haselgrove *et al.* (eds), *Archaeology From the Ploughsoil and Ulmschneider, Markets, Minsters and Metal-Detectors*, pp. 12–15. For an example of the bias in detector use in Norfolk see Gurney, 'A note on the distribution'.

⁶² Peers and Radford, 'Saxon monastery of Whitby'.

⁶³ Kelly, 'Trading privileges'; Foot, 'Role of the minster', p. 48; Blair, 'Minsters of the Thames', pp. 16–18.

⁶⁴ Archibald, 'Coinage and currency', p. 35. The quantities of *sceattas* now being recovered, principally through metal-detection, and recorded on the Corpus of Early Medieval Coin Finds from the British Isles 410–1180 (online via www.medievalcoins.org), show that the level of coinage in circulation in the eighth and early ninth centuries was not to be equalled until the twelfth century: see Blackburn, '“Productive” sites and the pattern of coin loss', pp. 31–4.

⁶⁵ Allan, 'The coins', pp. 85–6.

⁶⁶ Andrews, *Excavations at Hamwic*, pp. 252–6. Michael Metcalf has pointed out that because only a low proportion of coins might be expected to be lost while in use, and because coins were recovered over a wide area in the excavations at *Hamwic*, these provide far more effective evidence for the widespread use of coinage, with many transactions, than a simple assessment of individual mint outputs: Metcalf, 'The coins', p. 17.

⁶⁷ Whitwell *et al.*, 'Flixborough . . . assessment report', p. 163; Carr *et al.*, 'The Middle Saxon settlement at Staunton Meadow', p. 375.

discussion is the lack of any distinctive dress form known to have been worn by the inhabitants of *monasteria*, various injunctions instead being made urging monks and nuns to dress appropriately to their profession rather than, as Aldhelm suggested, adorning the body 'with forbidden ornaments and charming decorations . . . that the physical appearance may be glamorised in every part and every limb'.⁶⁸ Such comments appear to have been in vain, and dress fittings like pins cannot therefore be used to make any religious or secular identification. The discovery of other dress fittings like strap-ends or hooked tags in increasingly large numbers by metal-detection on other sites only reiterates the essentially secular nature of these finds.⁶⁹

Divorced from any contemporary documentary background as all are in East Anglia, the 'productive' site has been interpreted in various ways by archaeologists. At Barham in Suffolk, fifty *sceattas* have been found in addition to Ipswich ware pottery and 150 other non-ferrous finds, over an area of nearly seven hectares. The site, on a ridge overlooking the Gipping valley and adjacent to a Roman road (*Margary* 340), has suggested itself to John Newman as a market or meeting place, as well as a settlement site in the seventh to eighth centuries.⁷⁰ The 'productive' site at Bidford has similarly been interpreted as 'a market where cattle, sheep, horses and other commodities were bought and sold'.⁷¹

The presence of good communications, most particularly access to rivers, would be crucial to such centres of commercial activity which we might choose to identify with Hodges 'Type A' *emporia* model, periodic markets or fairs with limited, perhaps seasonal, settlement.⁷² Unfortunately, the limited archaeological investigation of most such sites is unable to show the extent to which any periodic market was organized and could thus be developed as an *emporium* of his 'Type B', rather than simply mutating to one of 'Type C', that is, continuing 'to function within a regional economy'.⁷³

This regional economic focus is one that remains under-explored as archaeological excavation, and thus discussion, has most often remained focussed on urban sites, emphasising the role of *emporia* like *Hamwic* or Ipswich. With recent re-evaluation of *emporia* and trading sites focussing on their embedded nature within a higher, more local, hinterland,⁷⁴ the role of *monasteria* as motors of economic development and production, against centralised royal control, may come to the fore.⁷⁵ More interesting is the distribution of sites which may be

⁶⁸ Alhelm, *De Virginitate*, §58, translated in Lapidge and Herren (eds), *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, p. 127.

⁶⁹ In his analysis of Anglo-Saxon pins, Ross was able to show their use in some ecclesiastical contexts but principally their use in everyday female dress, and their possible use by some men, to hold up the hair, and to pin together garments: Ross, 'Dress pins from Anglo-Saxon England', pp. 412–32.

⁷⁰ Newman, 'Wics, trade and the hinterland', pp. 38–43; 'Exceptional finds, exceptional sites?', pp. 99–101.

⁷¹ Wise and Seaby, 'Finds from a new "productive site"', p. 60.

⁷² Hodges, *Dark Age Economics*, pp. 50–1.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 51–2.

⁷⁴ van Es, 'Dorestad centred'; Hinton, 'Metalwork and the *emporia*'; Heidinga, 'From Kootwijk to Rhenen'. For an alternative view of *emporia* see Samson, 'Illusory *emporia* and mad economic theories'.

⁷⁵ For a discussion of the development of central places in this context see Austin, 'Central Place Theory and the Middle Ages'.

Monasticism in Middle Anglo-Saxon East Anglia

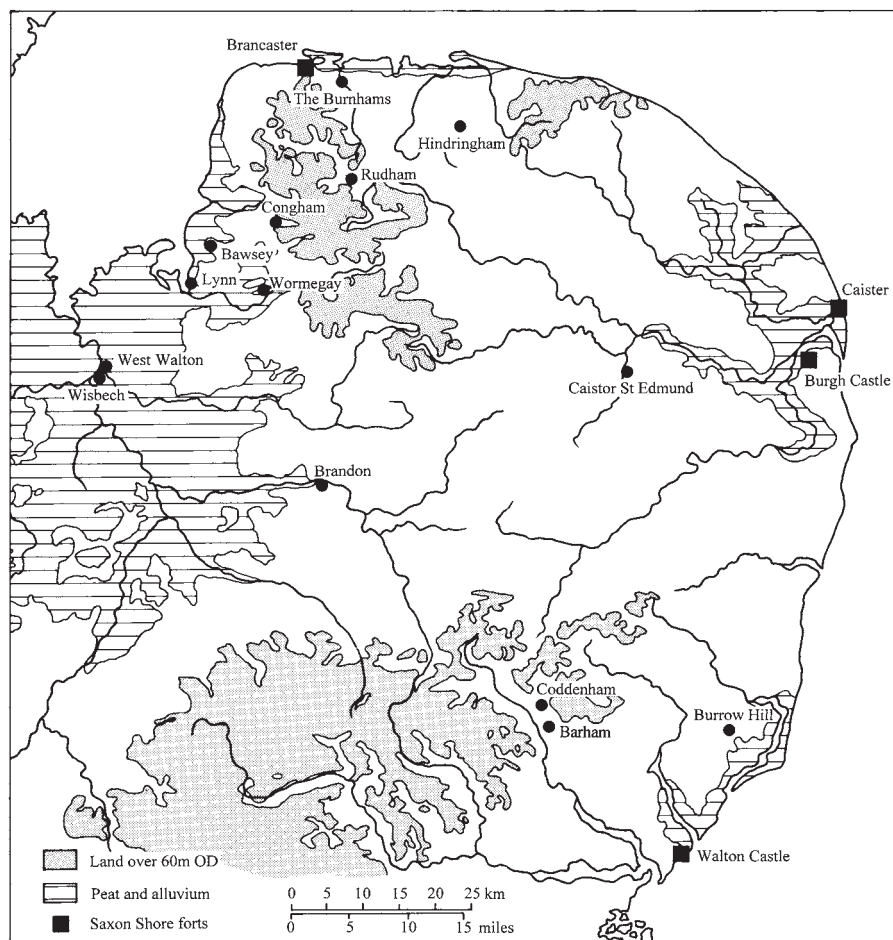


Fig. 8. The location of 'productive' sites in East Anglia.

identified as 'productive' within East Anglia. As shown in Fig. 8, they are not widely and evenly scattered, but have a definite bias to the west of Norfolk, extending into the Fen-edge (as with Brandon just over the border in Suffolk) and in south-east Suffolk.⁷⁶ Such a distribution could be taken to correlate with Hodges' model of 'Type A' *emporia* having a predominantly coastal distribution. Alternatively, if the 'productive' sites are to be identified as *monasteria*, their focus may indicate particular areas of 'monastic' occupation according better with the model presented by Cambridge and Rollason. It is, therefore, crucial to pursue how 'productive' sites may be identified, whether as a unitary explanation or not. This is heightened when some, such as Brandon and Flixborough, have been suggested to be religious on the basis of certain items of material culture of known importance to the life of the Church. In the case of Brandon, this is

⁷⁶ Rogerson, 'Six outstanding sites'; Newman, 'Exceptional finds, exceptional sites'; Pestell, 'The afterlife'.



Plate 3. Late eighth- or early ninth-century gold plaque inlaid with niello depicting the symbol of St John the Evangelist. Recovered in excavations at Staunch Meadow, Brandon, Suffolk. Photograph: R. D. Carr/ copyright Suffolk County Council.

encouraged by items such as the late eighth- or early ninth-century gold plaque depicting St John the Evangelist, probably a mount from a book cover or crucifix (Plate 3). Perhaps the one class of material evidence associated with religious life more than any other are the tools of literacy.

STYLI AND LITERACY

Conventional wisdom has long held literacy to have been the preserve of the Church in the Middle Anglo-Saxon period. In fact, the term literacy probably obscures a broad spectrum of abilities in which the capacity to read and write

might have ranged from the use of writing inscriptions on objects (that ‘so and so made me’), to accomplished biblical exegeses written in classical Latin. Literacy should perhaps be taken in its most general sense, of the ability to read and write; this encompasses the knowledge of, and access to, information imparted by text, and one that was not an ecclesiastical preserve.

Discerning the difference between the levels of literacy enjoyed by the occupants of a site is more difficult. The large-scale production and use of books might be argued to be most likely on a religious site, if it is assumed that the standards of literacy there were far higher than in secular society, and that the laity had no use for books. Regrettably, archaeological evidence for books is very poor, due to their organic and combustible nature. Furthermore, the difficulties in assigning manuscripts to particular scriptoria, especially the small number of early Anglo-Saxon codices, make the identification of literate communities problematical. Finds such as the plaque from Brandon hint at the former existence of books but only in terms of ownership rather than their production on site. Instead, evidence for the practice of literacy is conferred almost entirely upon one class of evidence, styli, the writing instruments used with wax-filled writing tablets or *tabellae*.

Unlike manuscripts, styli are associated with the short-term use of text, their erasers allowing the wax in tablets to be smoothed down for re-use. In enabling the transmission of writing, they would have been ideal for education and the teaching of reading and writing, as well as for the temporary use of texts, for instance in contemplative study. These applications might be considered more likely within a *monasterium*. Equally, styli could be used for the short-term notation of transactions, and therefore for administrative purposes in purely secular contexts. Archaeologically, the evidence is far better than for books. Although *tabellae* are rare,⁷⁷ styli appear generally to have been made from inorganic materials, ensuring that they are better represented in the archaeological record. Because the earliest finds of styli were made on monastic sites, for instance Whitby and Canterbury,⁷⁸ they have often come to be seen as correlates of monasticism, a view promoting an almost symbiotic relationship between the Church and literacy, which minimises secular involvement. As a consequence, many ‘productive’ sites yielding styli have also been seen as religious in origin. Understanding the potential of writing implements to act as a material correlate to *monasteria* therefore demands an appreciation of the evidence for secular literacy, and an analysis of the numbers and provenances of Anglo-Saxon styli.

⁷⁷ Evidence for Early Medieval *tabellae* is limited, presumably because they were most often made of wood, like the Irish example from Springmount Bog, which was only preserved because it was waterlogged: Armstrong and Macalister, ‘Wooden book with leaves indented’. The eighth-century Blythburgh *tabella* has only survived, in its damaged state, because it was made from whalebone. It can be dated on the basis of interlace decoration on its outer sides; Webster and Backhouse (eds), *The Making of England*, cat. no. 65; Waller, ‘Notes on part of a tabella’.

⁷⁸ Peers and Radford, ‘Saxon monastery of Whitby’; Radford, ‘Small bronzes from St Augustine’s’.

Secular literacy

Recent reassessments have pointed out the natural bias in our sources for understanding the development of literacy, the vast majority of textual evidence deriving from, and relating to, the Church. Additionally, many of the documents relating to the earliest period of Christianity, typically charters, are later copies or forgeries, incorporated into monastic cartularies.⁷⁹ This situation has led Susan Kelly to comment that ‘the king and many landowners might have followed the same practices [as the Church but] such secular records had no chance of direct survival’.⁸⁰ Closer examination of sources seems to be revealing increasing evidence for lay literacy, for instance in Francia there is good evidence for the skill, at least amongst the Merovingian lay nobility.⁸¹ Lay literacy is only directly evidenced in England from the tenth century, documents used in royal government surviving to suggest the existence of some form of royal ‘chancery’.⁸² For the Middle Anglo-Saxon period the evidence is more meagre. However, even the earliest Anglo-Saxons were not illiterate, bringing with them a runic alphabet, one letter of which even became adopted for use in Latin to represent an English sound (þ or ‘th’). Runes were used on some of the very first Anglo-Saxon coin issues, for instance the tremisses of **benutigo** or **benutid** type, c.630, while shillings (or *thrymsas*) were struck from the mid-seventh century in various places including East Anglia from c.660; runes continued in use on *sceattas* (pennies) into the eighth century.⁸³ Several finds from the period within East Anglia also bear runic inscriptions, demonstrating a knowledge of literacy within society.⁸⁴ The extent of this literacy is at the heart of modern investigations. Seth Lerer has seen runic inscriptions as being set within the context of cryptography, being a professional skill, while Elisabeth Okasha has suggested that many non-runic

⁷⁹ A situation that leaves us with only about 300 original Anglo-Saxon charters out of 1,500 known.

⁸⁰ Kelly, ‘Anglo-Saxon lay society’, p. 51.

⁸¹ McKitterick, *Carolingians and the Written Word*.

⁸² Keynes, ‘Royal government and the written word’, p. 255.

⁸³ The earliest runic shillings appear to have been struck c.660–70, for instance by the moneyer ‘Pada’; Webster and Backhouse (eds), *The Making of England*, p. 64 cat. nos 50–1. Pada has been argued to be a Kentish moneyer on the basis of the majority of his coins (30%) being found in that county. However, they may have been copied and ‘struck at various places in south-eastern England, both south and north of the Thames’: Hines, ‘Coins and runes’, pp. 53–4. More recently a unique East Anglian gold shilling, struck c.670, has been found at Billockby in Norfolk, bearing a clear runic legend . . . **ltoedhg** (reversed); see Page and Blackburn, ‘A new runic coin type’. The dating is made on the basis of the coin’s fineness and absence from the Crondall hoard, and its circulation date has been placed at c.660–80. Although the runes are enigmatic, the coin demonstrates that East Anglia was following the same minting practices seen in other kingdoms at this time. The use of runes in East Anglia was otherwise first seen on coins struck by the moneyer Epa and others, c.720–50 and most widely on the protopennies of King Beonna from c.760; Archibald, ‘Coinage of Beonna’.

⁸⁴ For instance three from Brandon; Parsons, ‘New runic finds from Brandon’. One, a silver tweezer fragment, bears the name ‘Aldred’. It is the most prestigious of the fourteen tweezers excavated, all the others being of bronze except one iron specimen. In addition to the more expensive metal, the runic tweezer had its inscription preceded by a cross in niello; Page, ‘New runic finds’, p. 193; Filmer-Sankey, *Brandon BRD 018*, unpublished, pp. 66–7. Another runic inscription from East Anglia in this period is the large gold composite disc brooch excavated from Harford Farm, Norfolk, manufactured some time in the seventh century and deposited c.700. This had on its reverse a runic inscription that ‘Luda repaired [the] brooch’; Ashwin *et al.*, ‘A silver composite disc-brooch’, p. 12; Hines, ‘Runic inscription on the composite disc brooch’, pp. 81–2.

inscriptions were made by craftsmen, or by composers of text for craftsmen.⁸⁵ Thomas Bredehoft has made a good case for extending a knowledge of literacy to a wider circle of society through what Stock has called a 'textual community', a 'micro-society organised around the common understanding of a script'.⁸⁶ Within this a difference is seen between an interpreter and a reader, the interpreter not necessarily needing to be able to read, only to claim to know what a text said. Bredehoft's analysis of the first-person inscriptions from objects shows many to have been read as though the object itself was speaking ('speaking objects'). Of the 24 such known inscriptions, 2 are of indeterminate Latin or Old English use, but the remaining 22 have 16 Old English and only 6 Latin inscriptions. From this, he has argued that people were more likely to be literate in English, using Latin letters rather than runes. Moreover, he has noted the writing of Latin 'fecit' in two Anglo-Saxon inscriptions as 'fecið', implying knowledge of this other language, but in vernacular usage. He suggests the inscribing of 'speaking objects' may have begun in Latin culture but became transformed 'once it had become current in the vernacular'.⁸⁷ This seems harder to accept given the very early tradition of rune use on objects such as the Harford Farm brooch (above, n. 84). More probably, inscriptions followed on from the runic, borrowing Latin 'fecit' in some, and in the case of the Blythburgh *tabella*, Latin word-forms were inscribed using runic letters.⁸⁸ These all tend to suggest a widespread knowledge and use of literacy in the native Old English and Latin forms.⁸⁹

The use of styli takes this knowledge of literacy further, since using temporary texts provides a bridge between simple or short transmissions of information, and the greater compositional work evidenced in manuscripts. It is this sense of 'literacy' with which we are most familiar in our own society.

Documentary references show several instances of secular literacy, all in the upper echelons of society.⁹⁰ Susan Kelly has pointed out the case of noblemen sending their sons to Bishop Wilfred to be educated, the sons choosing when they grew up whether to be priests or warriors; similarly, Bede described two seventh-century kings, Sigeberht of East Anglia and Aldfrith of Northumbria, as *doctissimus* or 'very learned'.⁹¹ Not only was this stratum of secular society intimately involved in the establishment of *monasteria*; their influence has been used

⁸⁵ Lerer, *Literacy and Power*, p. 167; Okasha, 'The commissioners' and 'Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England', pp. 86–7.

⁸⁶ Bredehoft, 'First-person inscriptions'; Stock, 'Listening for the text', p. 23.

⁸⁷ Bredehoft, 'First-person inscriptions', p. 107.

⁸⁸ The runic letters are in rows reading from left to right, covering most of the recessed surface; Parsons, 'Anglo-Saxon runic inscriptions', p. 222. For a similar use of latin word forms in runic script, occurring in a seventh or eighth-century gospel book, BL MS Cotton Otho C.v, see Page, 'Two runic notes', pp. 289–90.

⁸⁹ Familiarity with insular language and text recalls the letter of Aldhelm (d.709 or 710) to Æthilwald in which the bishop reminds his pupil that 'should you labour to know anything of secular letters' it should only be because 'the more easily will you understand the deepest and holiest meanings of . . . divine discourse': Lapidge and Herren (eds), *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, Letter XI, p. 168. The underlying point is clear – that the literate might read and write as freely in Old English as in Latin.

⁹⁰ Those same social strata which tended, of course, to have documents written about them.

⁹¹ Kelly, 'Anglo-Saxon lay society' pp. 59–60. For Wilfrid see Colgrave (ed. and transl.), *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, pp. 44–5, and for Sigeberht and Aldfrith see *HE*, ii, 15 and iv, 26.

to explain the preservation of Anglo-Saxon poetry such as *Beowulf*, *Waldere* and the *Finnsburgh Fragment*, which reflect a warrior society.⁹² James Campbell has gone further, arguing that the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the inmates of *monasteria* can be seen in essentially secular aristocratic terms.⁹³ A possible example of the use of working documents spanning both worlds is the toll charter of Æthelbald of Mercia issued in 733 to Bishop Ealdwulf and the church of St Andrew's, Rochester. Granting freedom from tolls on ships calling at London, it has been suggested that copies of the charter were carried on ships conducting business for the grantees, to be presented to the royal toll collectors. This presupposes that royal officials were able to read such privileges, or at least to recognise them for what they were.⁹⁴

A final point of importance is the more symbolic function of literacy. McKitterick has pointed out that it had a significance that was also 'a mentality through which power could be constructed and influence exerted'.⁹⁵ This is a feature we have already seen in the case of runic 'cryptology', but it makes it unlikely that secular rulers would cede to the Church sole control over the practice of writing, or knowledge of literacy. This 'power' is apparent from as early as the mid-sixth century, with the appearance of an intaglio ring in the burial deposit of the aristocratic ship burial at Snape (c.550). William Filmer-Sankey has shown that the ring was of a signet type, used for sealing documents, better paralleled on the Continent.⁹⁶ While few documents can have existed at this time in Anglo-Saxon England, the association was being made between a high-status activity and one that emphasised Continental practices with their overtones of *romanitas*. In this context, literacy cannot be seen as the preserve of the Church even if the ability of aristocrats to read, and the types of document they required, are arguably distinct from the type of shorter meditative writing that might be undertaken in a *monasterium*. The implication that the Church was used by the laity to educate their offspring (and we should probably include females in this⁹⁷) may also strengthen the case for the use of styli by non-ecclesiastics.

An analysis of Anglo-Saxon styli

If styli have traditionally been viewed as an ecclesiastical accoutrement through their discovery on documented religious sites, closer study reveals a less certain

⁹² Wormald, 'Bede, *Beowulf* and the conversion', p. 48.

⁹³ Campbell, 'Bede I', pp. 16–17.

⁹⁴ S 88. For an edition, see Campbell (ed.), *Charters of Rochester*, no. 2; Kelly, 'Trading privileges'.

⁹⁵ McKitterick, 'Conclusion', p. 320.

⁹⁶ Filmer-Sankey and Pestell, *Snape Anglo-Saxon Cemetery*, pp. 196–8. Filmer-Sankey's work concentrates on reset Roman intaglios in Germanic settings rather than straightforward 'second-hand' Roman rings being reused. However, the selection by the Anglo-Saxons of prestige metal Roman rings groups them together with reset examples and shows them as copying Continental exemplars.

⁹⁷ There is little direct evidence for female literacy but much Anglo-Saxon literature is anonymous and the aristocratic status of many nuns means that they may well have had the opportunities for learning to read and write. The use of feminine pronouns in the Old English translation of the Rule of St Benedict certainly suggests female literacy by at least the tenth century: Gretsch in Lapidge *et al.* (eds), *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 60–1; Gretsch, 'Æthelwold's translation of the *Regula Sancti Benedicti*', pp. 137–9.

picture.⁹⁸ Styli were clearly both more common and more widespread than has previously been appreciated. In total, some 97 are now known, from 32 sites (Fig. 9), although one location is unprovenanced,⁹⁹ and three styli are reported to have been found at Blythburgh when the *tabella* was uncovered there at the turn of the century; their survival or whereabouts are unknown. Of the 31 stylus provenances, only 11 have been documented as *monasteria* (Barking, Blythburgh, Bradwell, Bury St Edmunds, Canterbury, Dacre, Eynsham, Jarrow, Shrewsbury, Whitby and Whithorn). Self-evidently, this leaves the majority of sites – twice as many – with no documentary evidence for a religious function. Seven sites can be claimed as ‘productive’ (Bawsey, Brandon, Caistor St Edmund, Coddensham, Flixborough, Ryther and Wormegay), but only two, Brandon and Flixborough, have been excavated to any degree. As Table 1 shows, seventeen of the sites, just over half the sample, come from East Anglia in the sense of Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire. This remarkable distribution seems most likely to be principally a result of the good liaison between archaeologists and metal-detectorists in this predominantly agricultural region. It also underlines how under-representative the true picture of stylus distribution is likely to be.

If styli can be proven to be a correlate of religious life, it will confirm the interpretation of sites like Brandon and Flixborough as *monasteria*, and offers the prospect of providing a good alternative material correlate to apply to Eric Cambridge’s model. For instance, individual styli have been found at Sudbourne (Suffolk), and Fen Ditton (Cambs.). Sudbourne is an extensive parish which once contained Iken, probably to be identified as *Icanho*, given by King Edgar to Bishop Æthelwold (above p. 25 and n. 35). Fen Ditton was, until 1412, part of the parish of Horningsea, where there was once a *monasterium* ‘of royal dignity’.¹⁰⁰ These could be interpreted as indicating the presence of now-lost dependencies attached to a central monastic house. In reality, this evidence (like the few East Anglian instances of non-architectural sculptured stone) is too small for any credible case to be sustained. Many other styli come from sites with no such suggestion of a former religious centre nearby, for instance Grimston, Sedgeford and Tibenham in Norfolk and Otley in Suffolk. How, then, might styli have been used in a secular context? Few have been found on *wic* sites, for instance there are none (to my knowledge) from Southampton or London, but examples are known from York and more importantly, from Ipswich.

Here, an iron stylus was found accompanying a body in the seventh-century Buttermarket cemetery.¹⁰¹ The stylus was buried in the waist area, associated

⁹⁸ The following represents a summary of the Anglo-Saxon styli now known, which I intend to publish in more detail in a future article, detailing their classification, chronology and distribution. For the Flixborough styli see my report in Loveluck (ed.), *Flixborough: A High Status Middle to Late Saxon Settlement* (forthcoming).

⁹⁹ This example from the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (Reg. no. 1921.1047) was given by Sir Arthur Evans who bought it in Abingdon, Berks. (Hinton, *Catalogue of Anglo-Saxon Ornamental Metalwork*, p. 8). It seems possible at least that it derived from the Benedictine abbey there.

¹⁰⁰ *LE*, ii, 32.

¹⁰¹ Scull, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries of Boss Hall and St Stephen’s Lane/Buttermarket*, forthcoming. For an interim statement see Scull, ‘A cemetery of the seventh and eighth centuries’. I am grateful to

Landscapes of Monastic Foundation



Fig. 9. The distribution of Anglo-Saxon styli.

Monasticism in Middle Anglo-Saxon East Anglia

Table 1. Anglo-Saxon stylus-producing sites (known at July 2003), broken down by material

<i>Stylus location</i>	<i>Ae</i>	<i>Fe</i>	<i>Ag</i>	<i>Bone</i>	<i>?</i>	<i>Total</i>
Barking	3	2				5
Bawsey	6		1			7
(Blythburgh) ¹	1				(3)	1 (+3)
Bradwell	1	1				2
Brandon	3					3
Bury St Edmunds		1				1
Caister	1					1
Caistor St Edmund	1					1
Canterbury	2					2
Coddenham	2					2
Crimplesham					1	1
Dacre	1					1
Eynsham	1					1
Fen Ditton	1					1
Flixborough	6	15	1			22
Grimston	1					1
Ipswich		1		2		3
Jarrow	2					2
Northampton	1					1
Otley	1					1
Oxford (?Abingdon)	1					1
Ryther	5					5
Sedgeford	1	1				2
Shrewsbury	1					1
Sudbourne	1					1
Tibenham	1					1
West Stow		1				1
Whitby	11			1		12
Whithorn	1					1
Winchester	4	2				6
Wormegay	2					2
York		4		1		5
32 sites	62	28	2	4	1	97

¹ Three Blythburgh styli were never recorded properly and probably no longer survive so they are bracketed.

Key: Ae: copper-alloy (bronzes); Fe: iron; Ag: silver;
Bone: animal bone or ivory; ?: material unknown

with mineralised leather, and had probably been contained in a pouch as part of a belt set (Fig. 10). The body was a juvenile's and dated by high-precision radiocarbon analysis to c.640–80.¹⁰² The presence of this stylus on a young individual recalls their use by young clerics not yet *psalteratus* (that is, who had memorised

Chris Scull for allowing me to examine the stylus and for supplying information about the burial and its radiocarbon determination.

¹⁰² Cal AD 645–680 at 95% confidence (sample UB-4076: 1356±23BP). See further Scull and Bayliss, 'Radiocarbon dating' and 'Dating burials of the seventh and eighth centuries'.

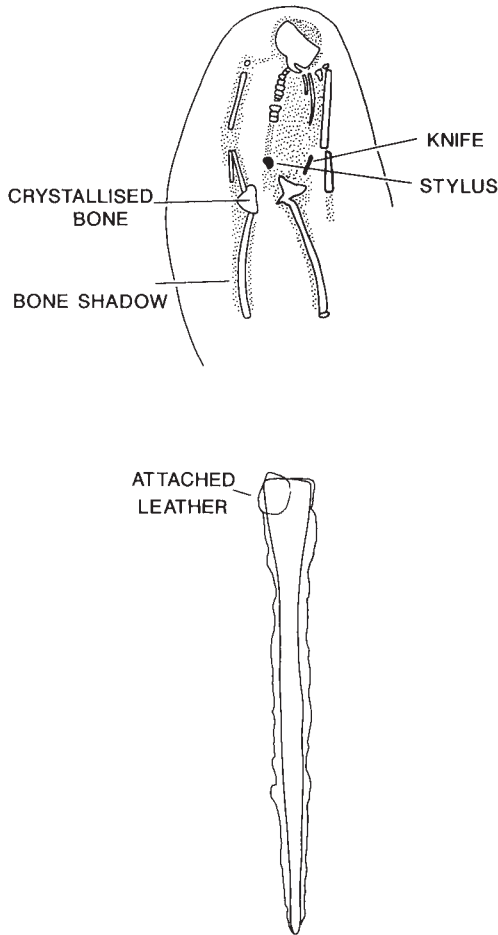


Fig. 10. An iron stylus from the Buttermarket cemetery, Ipswich (drawn from an X-ray) and a plan of grave 4269 in which it was found. Grave scale 1:20; stylus scale 1:2. (By kind permission of Chris Scull.)

all the Psalms, the key text in daily service); the *Rule of the Master*, a forerunner of St Benedict's Rule, required such monks to travel with wax tablets on which the Psalms were written. They could then be used to help in their learning during breaks on journeys.¹⁰³ The age of the body in the grave would fit in well with a young person still striving to become *psalteratus*. However, the Buttermarket cemetery has been interpreted as the burial ground of a trading community, probably including a number of foreigners, with no obvious Christian component; this is emphasised by the cemetery utilising predominantly pre-Christian burial practices.¹⁰⁴ In such a setting, a secular rather than religious owner was probably buried with their stylus, which in turn emphasises the wider use of these tools and wider access to literacy.

Another way to look at the Anglo-Saxon stylus is through its manufacture. Roman styli are very well known from excavations throughout Britain. They bear

¹⁰³ Brown, 'Dynamics of Literacy', p. 123.

¹⁰⁴ Scull, 'A cemetery of the seventh and eighth centuries', p. 98.

witness to widespread literacy in the Roman period and their almost exclusive manufacture in iron, without decoration, suggests a strictly utilitarian attitude to them; all that was required was a hard sharp point with a flat eraser. The known corpus of Anglo-Saxon styli shows the majority to be of copper-alloy (62 examples or 63.9%) as against 28 iron examples, the latter total boosted by the 15 found at Flixborough (53.57% of all iron styli). Although the proportion of copper-alloy examples has almost certainly been exaggerated by the number recovered through metal-detection, which discriminates against the recovery of iron, contemporary examples in bone from Ipswich, Whitby and York show that the suitability of other materials for these tools was usually ignored. Instead, it seems that the Anglo-Saxons had a view of these items as more prestigious, preferring copper-alloy for their manufacture, the same material used for many other items like dress pins, hooked tags and strap-ends found on 'productive' sites. Moreover, two styli (from Flixborough and Bawsey) are of silver. The prestige element seems certain; pins, like styli, are also found made of iron and bone but this functional ability had been replaced by other requirements such as decoration and status.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, eleven styli have decoration beyond simple ribbing or moulding on their shafts, bearing extensive designs on the erasers or, on two, at the top of the shaft immediately below the eraser (Fig. 11). Nine styli have decorative panels on one side of their eraser, recalling the design of elaborate disc-headed pins that have decoration on one side only, often in zoomorphic or interlace patterns.¹⁰⁶ These same patterns are used on the styli. Finally, the copper-alloy manufacture was added to, in several instances, by silvering on two examples from Brandon, a silver knotwork panel on a Flixborough example and a silver knotwork mount applied to an eraser on a Whitby stylus. Clearly, these items had moved beyond being simple writing implements to become prestige items in their own right.

Emphasis on the prestigious naturally raises the question of ownership and use. Documentary and archaeological evidence suggests that *monasteria* were often rich and contained expensive dress items. The evidence of styli hints that this could be expressed in the production or 'ownership' of literacy. With the important uses to which literacy was put, this concept of its ownership suggests one further aspect to the manufacture and use of styli – that they could have been worn, in much the same way as dress pins. Their decorative and prestige elements have been demonstrated and provide a ready explanation for the decorative panels on erasers and perhaps their presence on one face only.¹⁰⁷

Styli are often of a similar size to dress pins, especially the more elaborate ones, and share the sharp pointed ends suitable for piercing clothing. The number

¹⁰⁵ The two best excavated sites of this period, Brandon and Flixborough, have the following materials used for pins: copper-alloy, silver, lead and bone (Filmer-Sankey, *Brandon BRD 018*, pp. 21–9; Whitwell *et al.*, *Flixborough Middle Saxon Settlement*, p. 163). The vast majority from both are of copper-alloy.

¹⁰⁶ This total includes the copper-alloy stylus from Bradwell-on-Sea. No panel survives but examination of the stylus eraser shows that it clearly once had one, and traces of the solder to attach this still remain.

¹⁰⁷ Arguably decoration, especially chip-carved, could only have been carried on one side if the other were to be left flat enough to function properly as an eraser smoothing down the wax of a *tabella*.

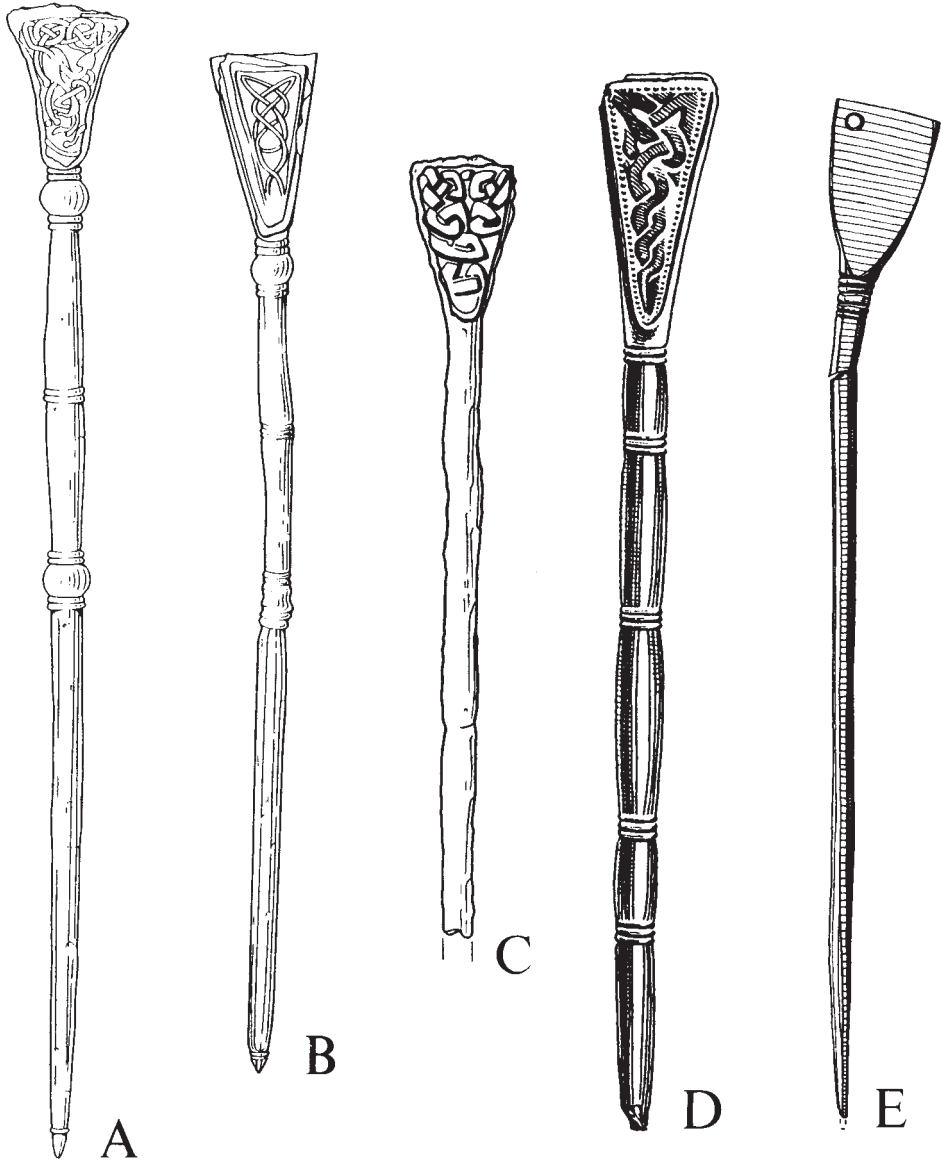


Fig. 11. Examples of Anglo-Saxon styli with attached decorative panels. A–C are from Flixborough, Humberside (Loveluck, *Flixborough*, forthcoming); D is from Whitby Abbey, N. Yorks. (after Peers and Radford, ‘Saxon monastery of Whitby’, fig. 15); E is a styliform pin from Grave 86, Morning Thorpe, Norfolk (after Green *et al.*, *Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Morning Thorpe*, fig. 322). Scale for all objects 1:1.

of styli that are bent is strikingly reminiscent of dress pins. In his analysis of the Brandon dress pins, William Filmer-Sankey considered the high number of bent examples (55% of his sample) as possibly being the result of the strains encountered in holding together clothing.¹⁰⁸ He also noted that 67% of the pins had thickenings in their shafts, typically three-fifths of the way down from the head, a design feature Ross has called 'hipping', used to ensure that they did not slip off easily.¹⁰⁹ Many styli are also bent and a large number have thickenings or bands at the centre. These features should not be taken to suggest that styli were actually an alternative type of dress pin; instead, aspects of their design show their close affinities with the design of 'styliform' pins such as pin Ci from grave 86 at the Morning Thorpe cemetery, Norfolk (Fig. 11), and a recent silver-gilt example with interlace from near Cley, Norfolk.¹¹⁰

As an expanding body of archaeological theory has recognised, objects could be, and frequently were, used as a powerful messaging medium.¹¹¹ If styli were worn on occasion as dress pins they would readily take on symbolic associations. Their 'ascriptive' treatment, re-defining the functional use of styli by removal from their normal context, would have made this more powerful and have been enhanced by decoration or embellishments.¹¹² In this way, styli could have acted as objects being used in a strategy of information exchange, made quite potent within a community on a large settlement site like Brandon. Their wear would have been a useful indicator of both the status of the owner and their access to the 'power' of literacy, with its overtones of education and erudition. This is a setting which recalls the runic evidence already examined where even those inscriptions apparently of gibberish (or the plain reading 'fuporc', being the first six letters of the runic alphabet) had a cachet that presupposed a knowledge of literacy.¹¹³

These possibilities suggest that styli cannot be seen as a specifically monastic or religious implement. Instead, their associations may have led to their use by secular society, both functionally and as a medium for expressing status and wealth. The association of styli with the Church is clear, as has been noted, but the widespread evidence of a lettered laity – or those desirous to be seen as literate – means that this last category of artefact, again, cannot be used as a correlate to monasticism. Their appearance on 'productive' sites may instead relate more to administrative use or as symbolic elements, being worn by those members of society who might aspire to reflective or compositional literacy. These were not only people who documentary sources tell us founded or entered *monasteria* –

¹⁰⁸ Filmer-Sankey, *Brandon BRD 018* and *The Pins of Brandon*, both unpublished. His analysis was made before excavations at Brandon were finished and so is based on a sample of 102 pins. However, his conclusions appear to be valid for the whole collection.

¹⁰⁹ Ross, 'Dress pins from Anglo-Saxon England', pp. 95–6.

¹¹⁰ Green *et al.*, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Morning Thorpe*, p. 225 and fig. 322. The styliform pin head is Norfolk SMR 31348.

¹¹¹ For a classic exposition of this see Wobst, 'Stylistic behaviour and information exchange'. See also Byers, 'Structure, meaning, action and things'.

¹¹² Byers, 'Structure, meaning, action and things', p. 1.

¹¹³ This was also apparently the case in those runic examples argued to be 'amuletic', where the runes were used to convert the inscribed object into an amulet. They therefore had a power which could be extended to the inscriber or 'rune master' showing their authority; Page, *Runes*, pp. 29–30.

they were the people who lived at wealthy centres controlling surrounding estates.

There are, in conclusion, no obvious categories of artefact that can be used to identify a site as purely 'monastic' or religious. The hints at patterns fitting Eric Cambridge's model are tantalising but cannot be sustained. Moreover, the way that no single category can be seen as solely monastic questions the emphasis that Cambridge places on non-architectural stonework as being a unique correlate. The strength of Cambridge's model is more likely to lie in its identification of early estates which in turn fortifies Pearce's approach to *monasteria*. Since no artefact type or assemblage allows convincing identification of Anglo-Saxon *monasteria*, more general topographical approaches perhaps provide a final opportunity to identify a religious function to sites.

SITE LAYOUT AND LOCATION

A regularised ground-plan and layout is perhaps one of the most characteristic features of medieval monasteries and arguably the one to which most archaeological effort has, historically, been devoted. Early Anglo-Saxon *monasteria*, by contrast, notably lack such standardised arrangements, and the layouts idealised in the St Gall ground-plan only became more rigidly implemented in England from the tenth century after the monastic reform. In the Middle Anglo-Saxon period the 'total impression . . . is of a variety of layouts within different types of enclosure'.¹¹⁴ For John Blair, this lack of specific ground-plans is misleading because traces of central planning are visible in the more general arrangement of church groups. In particular, he has focused on the use of three elements. First, the siting of the *monasterium* within an enclosure, often circular except if reusing Roman walls (for instance within an old fort). Second, the use of more than one church in a *monasterium*, and third, the axial arrangement of buildings on the site. Other features often encountered include 'typical' topographical positions (for instance on low hills, promontories, islands or bends in rivers) and the favoured reuse of Roman structures (such as villas or forts). Using these features, all found to a greater or lesser degree on sites known to have had an early religious element from documentary sources, Blair has created a model of what an early *monasterium* often looked like. He has then applied these elements to other sites to enable their identification as *monasteria*, even where no documentary evidence exists. A number of sites have been accorded this identification, notably Brandon in Suffolk and at Northampton and Cheddar, sites previously interpreted as royal or aristocratic palaces.¹¹⁵ The recently excavated high-status site at Flixborough in Humberside has been similarly regarded.

These are important arguments to consider, because their acceptance requires

¹¹⁴ Cramp, 'Monastic sites', p. 207.

¹¹⁵ Blair, 'Anglo-Saxon minsters: a topographical review', pp. 262–4 and 'Palaces or minsters?' For Brandon see Carr *et al.*, 'Middle Saxon settlement at Staunich Meadow' and for Northampton see Williams *et al.*, *Middle Saxon Palaces at Northampton*. For Cheddar see Rahtz, *The Saxon and Medieval Palaces at Cheddar*.

an acknowledgement that very few excavated high-status sites of this date actually represent the *villae regiae* of the founders and patrons of *monasteria*. It suggests this ruling class, which lived (and often died) by the sword to build territorial control and wealth, eschewed the material rewards of that power – yet it was readily expressed by religious institutions. As a logical extension, it suggests there were differing levels of material culture and a lack of stability in the secular settlements of the period in stark contrast to those of the Church.

Axiality

Because of the good documentary evidence for a number of religious sites (although with many, these sources are later in date), finding parallels is much easier for *monasteria* than secular estate centres. Consequently, a number of sites displaying an axial arrangement of buildings are visible as *monasteria* in early records, for instance St Augustine's Canterbury, Lindisfarne, Repton, Jarrow and Glastonbury. This arrangement of buildings appears to follow 'the conventions and traditions of the sixth- and seventh-century Franks' and would, on the face of it, seem to show another aspect of Continental, romanising, influence being used by the Church in England.¹¹⁶ Despite this, axial alignments are not proof of a purely religious arrangement for all sites where they occur, linearity also reflecting insular building practices, finding a ready parallel in the palace complex at Yeavinger, while Cowdery's Down and Wicken Bonhunt provide equally valid examples from sites of possible high status.¹¹⁷ Equally, more dispersed building layouts can be seen in the *monasteria* of Whitby and Hartlepool, which show no obvious axial alignment.¹¹⁸ Blair's interpretation of Brandon as a *monasterium* shows that even for him, axiality need not have been an essential design element.¹¹⁹

One further point to remember concerning questions of axiality are the unconscious factors that influence planning and site topography. Churches are always positioned along an east-west axis. If even one important building, such as a church, is built the obvious temptation for builders would be to put up other structures on a similar alignment. Similar influences have long been recognised in

¹¹⁶ Blair, 'Anglo-Saxon minsters: a topographical review', p. 250. See also the discussion at pp. 251–4 and figs 10.8–10.10.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 250; Hope-Taylor, *Yeavinger: An Anglo-British Centre*; Millett and James, 'Excavations at Cowdery's Down', fig. 31; Wade, 'A settlement site at Bonhunt Farm', fig. 38. The exceptional clarity of the features at Cowdery's Down was able to show the prestige of the buildings, hinting at the site's former status. Very few finds were recovered, probably as much a consequence of the excavation (done under less than ideal conditions with only 10–50% sampling of features and machine-stripping of all topsoil), as with the location (on a chalky ridge on agricultural land, which must have led to finds loss through colluvial movement). In this respect, Cowdery's Down shares many features with North Elmham and Cheddar: Wade-Martins, *Excavations in North Elmham Park*; Rahtz, *Saxon and Medieval Palaces at Cheddar*.

¹¹⁸ The difficulty with the excavations at Hartlepool and Whitby is that they were to the north of the area that might have been the centre of their precincts. Although a planned layout at Hartlepool has been argued for, it is unclear whether the peripheral buildings excavated do indeed align with the major ones: Daniels, 'Anglo-Saxon monastery at Church Close', p. 205.

¹¹⁹ Blair, 'Anglo-Saxon minsters: a topographical review', p. 263 and fig. 10.11 labelled 'a typical eighth-century minster?'

other branches of archaeology, for instance cemetery studies, where grave orientation can be structured according to topographical features such as tumuli, nearby paths or church apses.¹²⁰ Indeed, one might argue that a similar arrangement can be seen on modern housing estates with roads having similar structures facing onto them in rows. For Middle Anglo-Saxon sites, with structures such as a church and/or hall on a specific alignment, it must have been more difficult to break away from this pattern when erecting new buildings than to think about conforming to a recognised formula from antique and Frankish contexts.

Numbers of churches

Intimately linked to the notion of axiality are sites with at least two, and sometimes three or more, churches. This feature is rooted in late antique architectural practice, with numerous Continental examples, and was also an ongoing process with churches being added to some sites at a later date. The reason for two (or more) churches on a site is unclear but is presumably liturgical. Suggestions have included provision for double monasteries of monks and nuns; for the baptised and catechumens (Christians as yet unbaptised); or for the veneration of different saints. The multiple-church phenomenon is perhaps one of the most unequivocal features found on many early sites with a known religious history, and appears to have been one of the primary reasons for Blair to interpret Brandon as a *monasterium* although only one church has been excavated; another is implied by a second cemetery that surrounds the remains of a suggested chapel at the centre of the site, probably medieval but undated, and seen only briefly in trial trenching (Fig. 12).¹²¹

Other possible explanations for more than one church existing on a site might be made, most notably that some may have fulfilled a role as private chapels to founders, specifically for an attendant secular community on a site. It would be foolish, however, to deny the religious aspect that multiple church arrangements demonstrate on a site and it might be that such churches provide the best way to identify *monasteria*. The difficulty is the sheer frequency of this arrangement. If high-status secular settlements had religious communities attached to them, it might be understandable to find these communities having more than one church or chapel; it need not signal that the whole site belonged to an independent religious community.¹²² More awkward is that in East Anglia especially, more than forty sites are known where two or even, as at Reepham, Norfolk, three churches shared one churchyard. The reasons for such arrangements are unclear and may

¹²⁰ Sherlock and Welch, *An Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Norton, Cleveland*, p. 15; Rodwell, *Church Archaeology*, p. 145.

¹²¹ Blair, 'Anglo-Saxon minsters: a topographical review', p. 263; Carr *et al.*, 'Middle Saxon settlement at Staunch Meadow', p. 371.

¹²² It is notable that a number of baptisms described by Bede occurred at secular sites, for instance Peada, king of the Middle Angles, being baptised by Bishop Finan at the royal estate (*in vico regis*) of *Ad Muram* (HE, iii, 21) and Swithelm of the East Saxons at the royal vill of Rendlesham in Suffolk (*in vico regio*: HE, iii, 22). While these ceremonies were inevitably occasions inviting symbolic display due to the royal personages involved and the political implications of the ceremony, the use of expressly royal settlements suggests such villas were provided with churches or chapels.

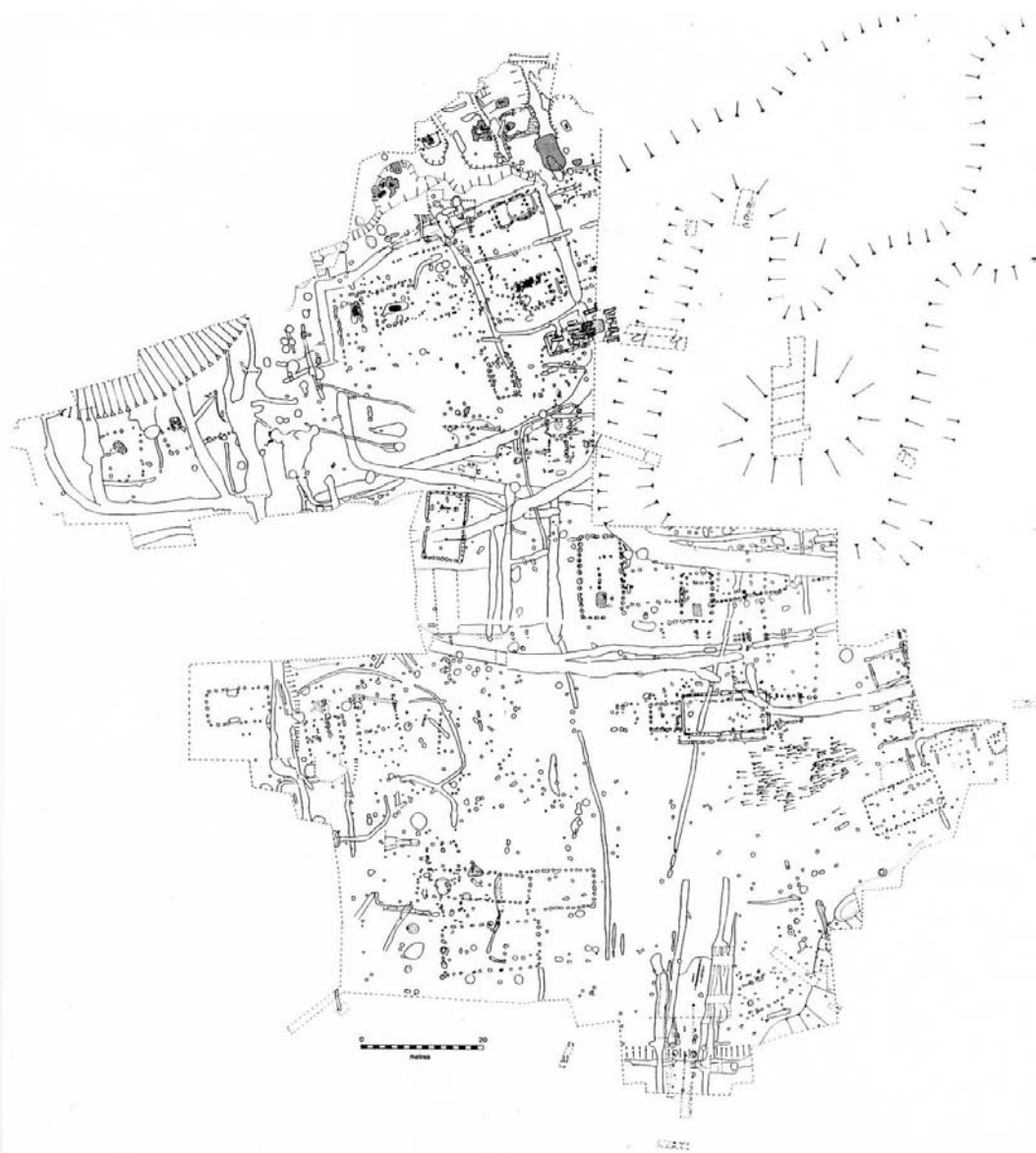


Fig. 12. Excavation plan of the settlement site at Brandon, Suffolk (by kind permission of R. D. Carr/ copyright Suffolk County Council).

relate to local freeholders responding to a lack of ecclesiastical provision or engaging in competitive building while maintaining links with an ancestral graveyard.¹²³ Despite very few examples having any obvious significance as former estate centres, this difference cannot be assumed.

Topographical setting

A more serious problem with traits of a supposedly religious nature concerns the presence of the *vallum monasterii* that was supposed to enclose these religious sites, protecting inmates from the secular world outside. Actual traces of such features have often been more difficult to identify, conceivably saying more about the desire of religious writers to perceive or to create for their readers the concept of isolation from the outside world, rather than the inability of archaeologists to identify such boundaries. In fact, the whole question of the *vallum monasterii* is potentially quite thorny and linked to more general topographical considerations. Cramp, for instance, was able to point to only a handful of excavated instances of a *vallum*, and suggested that 'sometimes natural features formed the enclosure on promontory or peninsula sites'.¹²⁴

It would appear that while some new examples of enclosures have been identified more recently, for instance that at Bampton (Oxon.) where a four-metre-wide ditch was backfilled in the late eleventh century,¹²⁵ the use of ditched enclosures was again not unique to religious sites. Not only did Wicken Bonhunt in Essex have a substantial boundary ditch dug about 700; a Middle to Late Anglo-Saxon site excavated in 1995 at Whitehouse Road, Bramford near Ipswich had a D-shaped enclosure ditch up to 2.8m wide and 1.4m deep, measuring up to 80×100m (Fig. 13). The ditch evidently went out of use some time in the Late Anglo-Saxon period as a building of this date was constructed over the infill.¹²⁶ Similarly, the 'productive' site at Cottam (E. Yorks.), discovered by metal-detection and partially excavated 1993–5, was surrounded by a fence, later a more substantial ditch and bank, enclosing an area up to 65×58m.¹²⁷ While the latter two sites are smaller than some suggested *monasteria*, they ably demonstrate the wider secular practice of enclosure.

Topographical position is something that is easier to define than infilled former ditches and East Anglia has a number of sites in dominant situations suggested to be former *monasteria*. The documented religious sites of Ely, Horningsea and *Icanho/Iken*, and the 'productive' sites of Bawsey, Burrow Hill and Wormegay (Fig. 14), are all set prominently within low-lying land, often marshy, that must have been as easily reached by boat as by causeways connecting them to the 'mainland'. Blythburgh in Suffolk, for instance, is best

¹²³ Warner, 'Shared churchyards'; Williamson, *Origins of Norfolk*, p. 159.

¹²⁴ Cramp, 'Monastic sites', pp. 203–4.

¹²⁵ Blair, 'Anglo-Saxon minsters; a topographical review', p. 233; 'Bampton: an Anglo-Saxon minster?', pp. 126–7.

¹²⁶ Wade, 'A settlement site at Bonhunt Farm', p. 96; for Bramford see Nenck *et al.*, 'Medieval Britain and Ireland in 1995', pp. 284–5 and Martin *et al.*, 'Archaeology in Suffolk 1995', pp. 476–9.

¹²⁷ Richards *et al.*, 'Cottam: an Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian settlement', p. 89.

Monasticism in Middle Anglo-Saxon East Anglia

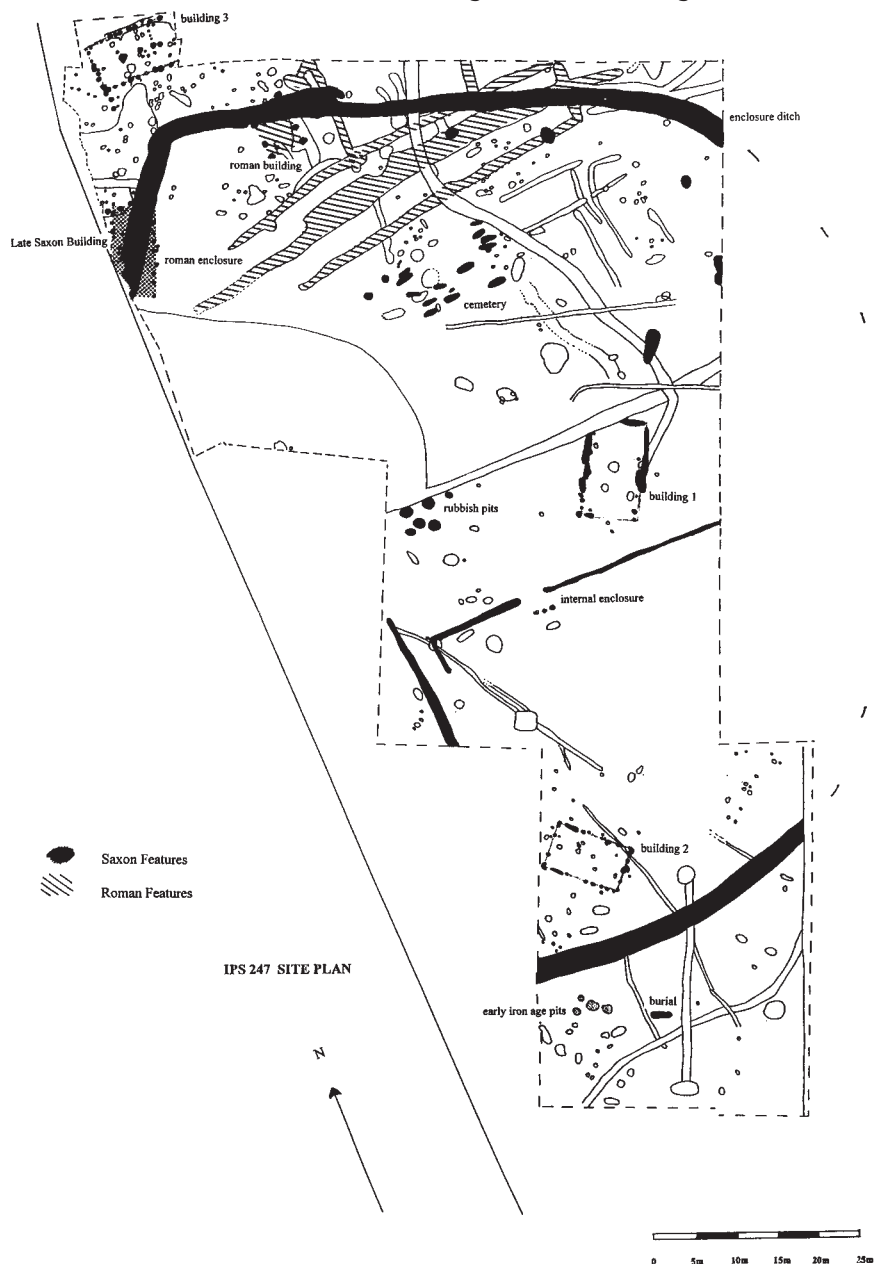


Fig. 13. Excavation plan of the settlement site at Whitehouse Road, Bramford, Suffolk (by kind permission of Jo Caruth/ copyright Suffolk County Council).

Landscapes of Monastic Foundation

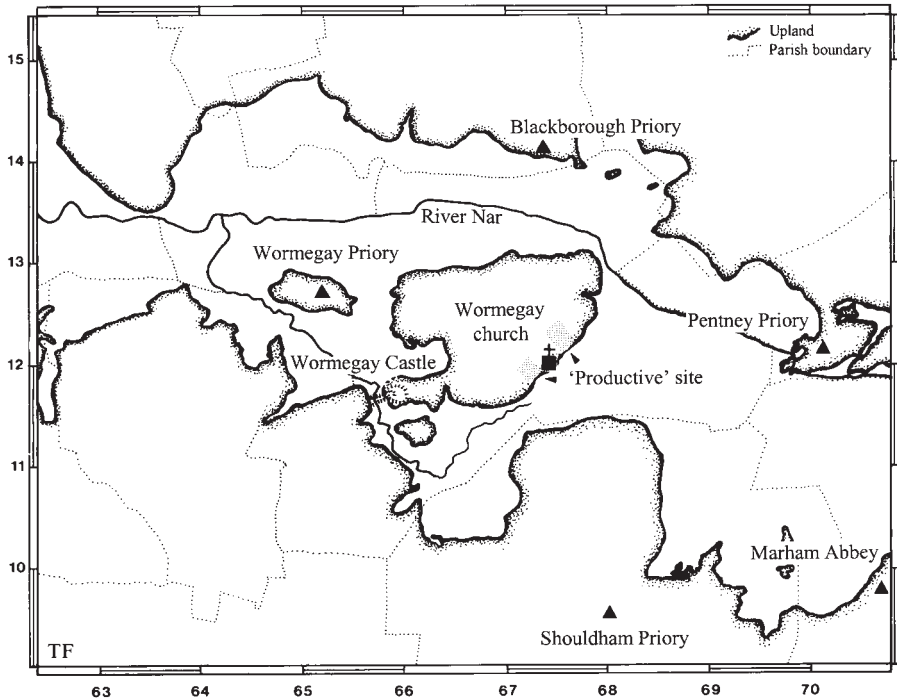


Fig. 14. The topographical setting of Wormegay, Norfolk, showing its Middle Anglo-Saxon 'productive' site and surrounding medieval foundations.

seen in the 'island' sense, having access to the River Blyth yet being surrounded by low-lying marshland. Although the village is not actually cut off like an island, it forms a promontory overlooking the river and estuary. A similar island-like situation pertained at Brandon which was connected to the edge of the Little Ouse valley by a raised causeway.¹²⁸

There can be little doubt that these types of sites were popular with *monasteria*, numerous examples of documented sites being found in such locations; the difficulty is in deciding whether such locations were favoured only by ecclesiastics. Modern-day perceptions of isolated locations may well be removed from contemporary notions, and such sites were often 'in the kinds of places that might equally well have attracted royal villis'.¹²⁹ It is this question of locational strategy that lies at the heart of the debate, and it is of more than passing interest to note the evidence of documentary and literary sources on concepts of isolation and liminality.

Typically, these place religious communities or individuals in liminal, isolated positions, as, for instance, in Felix's *Life of Guthlac*. According to Felix, Guthlac settled himself within a place where he built his hermitage (the island of

¹²⁸ Carr *et al.*, 'Middle Saxon settlement at Staunch Meadow', p. 371.

¹²⁹ Blair, 'Anglo-Saxon minsters; a topographical review', p. 231.

Crowland) haunted by fen-dwelling demons.¹³⁰ Similarly in *Beowulf* the hero has to encounter the monster Grendel, a denizen of meres and marshes. The image is that the Anglo-Saxon consciousness saw such isolated or marshy sites as liminal or withdrawn, perhaps even threatening, and on this basis, islands and marshlands may have acted as a natural *vallum* favouring their use by religious inhabitants. This arrangement may not be so straightforward. While Anglo-Saxon literature did indeed portray some sites in unfavourable ways, as Sarah Semple has shown, there are contradictions in the ways in which such sites were presented in literature and, as archaeological evidence demonstrates, were exploited.¹³¹ Focussing on burial mounds, she has pointed out how these places were seen both as fearful, harbouring evil spirits, and yet also acted as foci for public assemblies, the administration of justice and markets. It is in such a context that the example of Guthlac must be seen, for it is the barrow on which he builds his large hut which is the home of the evil spirits and devils that he overcomes, rather than the island of Crowland.¹³² Semple explains the apparent contradiction between the fears, and everyday use, of barrows by the Anglo-Saxon populace in terms of the literary references in such tales as *Beowulf* or *The Life of St Guthlac*, reflecting

ecclesiastical perception in the eighth century but . . . not necessarily . . . the view of the laity. These sources may indeed have been used to try and dissuade the continuation of such practices [the continued use of pagan sites for family burial].¹³³

Not only is this a convincing explanation for why such sites were demonised or had a liminality created for them; it emphasises the importance of the Church in structuring and mediating ideologies which were not just their own, but ironically reflected secular power. In particular, the use of burial mounds as places of execution reiterated these sites' position in the context of royal power and control.

Not only can an ideological control over the perception of these sites be seen, but in purely topographical terms, sites such as Bawsey, Brandon or Ely should not be viewed as liminal or especially reclusive. As Carr *et al.* have pointed out, Brandon was probably the lowest crossing point of the Little Ouse until recent times, a position serving a wide hinterland which made it the obvious location to become a nexus for local trade.¹³⁴ A redistributive function is also likely at Bawsey, its high quantity of coinage suggesting use as a centre with trading contacts. More generally, the riverine or island nature of many sites demonstrates the crucial role of water for communication and the transport of goods in the Anglo-Saxon period, when Continental towns might be more accessible than land-locked English ones.¹³⁵

Ely is an island site and may be said to conform to this general pattern but in

¹³⁰ Colgrave (ed.), *Felix's Life of St Guthlac*. For a recent discussion see Meaney, 'Felix's Life of St Guthlac'.

¹³¹ Semple, 'A fear of the past'.

¹³² Colgrave (ed.), *Felix's Life of St Guthlac*, pp. 93–5.

¹³³ Semple, 'A fear of the past', p. 121.

¹³⁴ Carr *et al.*, 'Middle Saxon settlement at Staunich Meadow', p. 371.

¹³⁵ Carver, 'Pre-Viking traffic', p. 122. The coinage from Bawsey, for instance, 'could suggest that Bawsey did indeed have direct links with central or northern, rather than southern Frisia': Blackburn *et al.*, 'A productive Middle and Late Saxon site at Bawsey', unpublished.

size it is completely atypical, being considered, by Bede at least, as an entire region (*in regione quae vocatur Elge*: *HE*, iv, 19). On this basis, the microtopography of this particular island site remains to be defined more clearly, to identify the nature and extent of settlement here and to provide a context for the positioning of the subsequent abbey and cathedral site. More generally, the Isle of Ely has a good archaeological record with a sizeable number of strayfinds and limited excavation, all of which demonstrate continuity in occupation on the site from the Roman period through to the present day. While this is partly a consequence of the topographical situation of the Isle, it also stresses the obvious placing of a seat of power here. The island, lying on the west bank of the River Ouse and three miles from its junction with the River Lark, dominates the surrounding area. Early Anglo-Saxon objects and two Migration period cemeteries indicate pre-Christian occupation on the Isle,¹³⁶ reiterating the presence of an earlier secular centre implied by Bede.

The influence of romanitas

One final characteristic of early religious establishments remains: the use of earlier Roman sites. Their re-use by the early Church is well known from documentary and archaeological sources, with many examples, including Bradwell-on-Sea, Essex; Reculver, Kent and Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire. The Anglo-Saxon missionaries to Germany also followed this pattern of re-use, Willibrord founding a church that was to act as a headquarters for the Frisian mission at Wittsburg, now Utrecht.¹³⁷ Christian baptism also often took place in Roman towns, invoking connections with the imperial past.¹³⁸ These uses all suggest that the Anglo-Saxon Church maintained an idea of adherence to its Roman roots in the way that it used sites.

In examining the evidence for Roman structures acting as religious foci in East Anglia, the lack of documented examples puts a premium on those which are known, notably *Cnobheresburg*. The religious community here is one of only two mentioned by name by Bede (Ely being the other). He describes how an Irish monk, Fursa, settled at *Cnobheresburg*, 'pleasantly situated close to the woods and the sea in a Roman camp' (*HE*, iii, 19).¹³⁹ Traditionally, this has been associated with Burgh Castle, a Roman shore fort on the Norfolk-Suffolk border, an identification reiterated on the basis of Middle Anglo-Saxon finds made in limited excavation by Charles Green in the late 1950s and early 1960s.¹⁴⁰ However, James Campbell has dismissed this possible location because Bede's description of the site, using the suffix *-burg*, differed from his usual use of describing Roman forts as *castra*.¹⁴¹ This seems difficult to accept so simply. Not

¹³⁶ Cambridgeshire SMR numbers 02074 and 02104.

¹³⁷ Parsons, *Books and Buildings*, p. 17. See also Bell, 'Churches on Roman buildings'.

¹³⁸ Bradley, 'Altering the earth', p. 122.

¹³⁹ Colgrave and Mynors (eds and transl.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, pp. 270–1.

¹⁴⁰ Johnson, *Burgh Castle*; Dahl, *The Roman Camp and the Irish Saint*. The identification of *Cnobheresburg* with Burgh Castle appears to have been begun by Camden: Campbell, 'Bede's words for places', p. 101.

¹⁴¹ Campbell, 'Bede's words for places', p. 101.

only is there some latitude in Bede's vocabulary (four places being called both a *civitas* and an *urbs*); the presumption is that Fursa's monastery should be an 'important' place – in reusing a Roman fort, the place must therefore have been 'important' and most likely to be described as a *civitas*. However, there is some consistency in Bede's use of *urbs* for places ending *-burg*, and an *urbs* could be a fortress not of significance. Indeed, Eddius Stephanus uses a similar selection of words to Bede but uses *urbs* three times where 'all are described as royal and the context makes it clear that all are fortresses'.¹⁴² With the place described only as 'Burgh' in Domesday Book,¹⁴³ the 'Castle' element to the place-name seems to have become current only following the raising of a motte within the shore fort at a date unknown, probably some time in the eleventh century.¹⁴⁴

It is not unlikely that Burgh Castle could have been considered only an *urbs* by Bede. More uncertain is the identification of *Cnobheresburg*, not least because the description given by Bede might be said to apply to the other two East Anglian Saxon Shore forts, at Caister and Brancaster, and this ignores Walton Castle, arguably to be identified as the location of *Dommoc*.¹⁴⁵ The archaeological evidence from Caister is equally strong in indicating a Middle Anglo-Saxon presence with 408 Ipswich ware sherds, a cemetery with 139 articulated individuals, a stylus and seven eighth-century *sceattas* among the finds. Brancaster has not received any substantial intramural investigation but has still yielded sherds of imported Tating ware.¹⁴⁶ If Bede's description of a *castrum* is accepted as representing a Saxon Shore fort, there are at least three possible candidates; of even more importance for considering the Anglo-Saxon context is the way that *all* of these sites appear to have had Middle Anglo-Saxon occupation. Because Blair has seen a 'virtual absence of evidence for Anglo-Saxon *villae regales* in Roman walled places before the tenth century', this might suggest the East Anglian Roman sites should all be considered religious.

The danger of such an approach is that we can become locked into a circular argument whereby each new case is interpreted as an ecclesiastical site, confirming any others that should emerge. There is increasing evidence for the reuse of earlier fortified sites in the Anglo-Saxon period, as the identification of 'productive' sites immediately outside the Roman walled town of Caistor St Edmund near Norwich, and at Coddensham, an important Roman small town and possibly auxiliary fort, show.¹⁴⁷ A claim has also been made for Offa of Mercia once to have had a palace within the walls of Cripplegate Roman fort in London,

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 104.

¹⁴³ Of four carucates in the holding of Ralph the Crossbowman, *LDB* fol. 445a.

¹⁴⁴ Johnson, *Burgh Castle*, p. 4. See also Conclusion, p. 223 n. 17.

¹⁴⁵ Above, n. 8.

¹⁴⁶ For the pottery from these sites see Dallas, 'Middle and Late Saxon pottery' for Caister, and Hodges, 'An unusual ?Tating-ware vessel' for Brancaster. For more general discussion of these sites see Darling with Gurney, *Caister-on-Sea Excavations* by Charles Green, and Hinchcliffe with Sparey Green, *Excavations at Brancaster 1974 and 1977*.

¹⁴⁷ For Caistor St Edmund see Andrews, 'Middle Saxon Norfolk', p. 23 and Penn, *Excavations on the Norwich Southern Bypass Part II*, pp. 101–4. For Coddensham see Moore *et al.*, *Archaeology of Roman Suffolk* and Millett, *Romanization of Britain*, p. 62. Most of the Anglo-Saxon finds from Coddensham are published in West, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Material from Suffolk*, pp. 19–24 and figs 18–23.

with St Alban's church as its chapel sitting on the main north-south road which ran through the fort. One might also note the apparently axial alignment of this church with two others (St Mary Staining and St Mary Aldermanbury), one on either side. However, the location of the palace is based on the thirteenth-century belief of Matthew Paris, quoting an eleventh-century source, and sixteenth-century tradition.¹⁴⁸ While it is true that an Anglo-Saxon precursor has been excavated beneath the medieval church of St Albans and Late Anglo-Saxon occupation evidence has been found on the traditional site of the palace,¹⁴⁹ the evidence for such a building of Offa is, so far, very weak.

There are numerous other instances of the Anglo-Saxon reuse of earlier sites, a tradition beginning with the location of many Migration-period cemeteries around Bronze Age burial mounds or adjacent to many Roman sites, as with two cemeteries just outside Caistor St Edmund.¹⁵⁰ In the case of Thornham in north-west Norfolk, an apparently seventh-century cemetery was laid out in north-south rows within the neat rectilinear ditched enclosure of a Roman signalling station.¹⁵¹ An aristocratic reflection of this process is the placing of the Taplow barrow within an Iron Age hillfort.¹⁵² Settlement sites can similarly be seen, for instance the reuse of the possible Iron Age hillfort at Tasburgh, and that at Thetford in Norwich.¹⁵³ All indicate an interest in these locations, on occasions even before the arrival of Christianity. It seems better to have a measure of caution and not to exclude the possibility of Roman walled sites being used as *villae regales*.¹⁵⁴ It may well be that the Church took the lead in popularising such places, but it would be unwise to make a blanket denial of secular attraction to these centres.

¹⁴⁸ The case is outlined in Biddle and Hudson, *Future of London's Past*, p. 20 and repeated by Hobley, 'Lundenwic and Lundenburh', p. 73 and Fig. 30; Clark, *Saxon and Norman London*, pp. 11 and 14, and Vince, *Saxon London*, pp. 54–6. The suggestion continues to live on, occurring in Museum of London, *A Research Framework for London Archaeology*, pp. 48–9.

¹⁴⁹ Grimes, *Excavation of Roman and Mediaeval London*, pp. 159 and 203–9.

¹⁵⁰ Bradley, *Altering the Earth*; Lucy, *Anglo-Saxon Way of Death*, pp. 124–30 and fig. 5.1; Myres and Green, *Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries of Caistor-by-Norwich and Markshall*.

¹⁵¹ The cemetery, Norfolk SMR 1308, is unpublished although I hope to prepare the material for publication in the near future. Of the 24 graves excavated in limited trenching undertaken in the 1950s and 1960, 13 graves were unfurnished. Of the accompanied burials, one grave, 10, had a number of diagnostically seventh-century grave-goods including a bronze chatelaine – carrying 6 beads, and a hanging bowl escutcheon (now NCM 1960.341.276 and 1956.244.302 respectively). For the Roman fort at Thornham see Gregory and Gurney, *Excavations at Thornham, Warham, Wighton and Caistor St Edmund*, pp. 1–13. For the discussion of chatelaines and hanging-bowls in the graves of this period see Geake, *Use of Grave-Goods in Conversion-Period England*, pp. 57–8 and 85–8.

¹⁵² Allen and Lamdin-Whymark, 'Taplow hillfort', pp. 287–8.

¹⁵³ For the difficulties in dating Tasburgh see Rogerson and Lawson, 'Earthwork enclosure at Tasburgh', especially at pp. 57–8. For Thetford see Davies and Gregory, 'Excavations at Thetford Castle' especially at pp. 28–30, and Andrews, *Excavations at Redcastle Furze*, pp. 26–7.

¹⁵⁴ Again, our principal sources for this period are ecclesiastical which tend to stress the role and possessions of the Church. Moreover, Bede is prominent among these, and when Blair cites churches that were integral to royal palaces in the seventh century, they are unsurprisingly mostly from Northumbria, the area that Bede knew best: Blair, 'Anglo-Saxon minsters: a topographical review', p. 231.

DISCUSSION

At the beginning of this chapter the difficulty of defining what constituted an Anglo-Saxon *monasterium* was introduced. Central to this was the debate concerning the character of these institutions and the extent of their isolation or secular involvement. For some, such as Eric Cambridge and David Rollason, a very real monastic disposition has been identified, with a characteristic way of life leading to the production and use of distinctive forms of material culture. The preceding examination has, I hope, shown the difficulty in making such 'monastic' identifications. Indeed, the foregoing has at times possibly appeared to be aimed at contradicting the efforts of those trying to advance the identification and discussion of England's *monasteria*. This is manifestly not intended; instead, I have attempted to show the difficulty in applying each individual strand of evidence as a determinant of a religious rather than secular site. Without it, we face the dangerous possibility of seeing an emerging Anglo-Saxon landscape governed at all its key, nodal, points by the Church, rather than the aristocracy and secular rulers who lived and died in the pursuit of power, and who were the Church's sponsors.

In reality, estates would in most cases have been run by secular controlling interests such as royal or aristocratic families. Their presence provides a context for the wealth of settlements such as Brandon and Flixborough just as much as a religious community, and it seems unlikely that all prestige metalwork assemblages should be attributed to religious sites rather than secular. More recently, Chris Loveluck has suggested that at Flixborough the archaeological record may reflect a series of changes in the nature of the site's use, with certain periods being more archaeologically visible, for instance through finds. These perhaps reflect changes in the use of the settlement either, simplistically, in terms of an estate centre becoming a minster and then returning to a secular basis; or more probably undergoing 'a complex sequence of settlement change, reflecting fluctuations in both the presence and character of sites, and also variation in the media of social display'.¹⁵⁵ The question of material culture is especially pertinent: objects with obvious Christian symbolism are undiagnostic because it should be anticipated that secular rulers would have been as keen to show their Christianity and wealth on high-status items as churchmen.¹⁵⁶ This point is all the more ironic given the discussion that has been lavished on those elements of the Sutton Hoo mound one treasure, where Christian imagery has been argued to show the conversion of an unknown occupant, despite being contained in a burial of pure pre-Christian form.

A lesson, perhaps, is that we should not attempt to make clear or rigid

¹⁵⁵ Loveluck, 'Wealth, waste and conspicuous consumption', p. 121.

¹⁵⁶ One may also note that many ecclesiastical finds of this period are stray-finds and not associated with, for instance, specific 'ecclesiastical' or 'productive' sites. An example is an eighth-century silver-gilt mount fragment bearing an animal, possibly the lion of St Mark, recently found near Norwich in a field with no evidence for settlement nearby: Webster, 'Treasure report: East Norfolk silver-gilt mount fragment'.

distinctions. Historians have long been aware of the secular characteristics apparent in many *monasteria*. Their presence led to Bede, in modern parlance a Benedictine fundamentalist, describing the inhabitants of ‘false’ *monasteria* as ‘totally ignorant of the monastic life’ in his celebrated letter of 734 to Archbishop Egbert, and who ‘devote themselves to loose living and fornication’.¹⁵⁷ Likewise, the 747 Council of *Clofesho* added the caveat in reference to such *monasteria* ‘if indeed it is correct to so call them’.¹⁵⁸ The poetry of this warrior society was preserved in Christian contexts, showing the close relationship of the two worlds. Indeed, the difficulty in definition does not appear to have been anything new. As far back as 451, a Canon of the Council of Chalcedon stated that

monasteries which have been once consecrated with the sanction of the bishop are to remain monasteries, and the things which belong to them are to be preserved, and they are no more to become secular dwellings. But those who suffer this to be done shall undergo the canonical punishments.¹⁵⁹

These instances do not mean that people could not choose to live a contemplative life away from the outside world. Instead, it seems inherently likely that there was fluidity in both settlement form and its material culture, and in the nature of religious observance and interaction with the secular world practised on such sites.¹⁶⁰ Although this model had been criticised as a ‘lowest common denominator’ approach by Cambridge and Rollason,¹⁶¹ it tallies far better with what we know of our historical and archaeological sources. Above all, it is the simplistic rigidity of interpretation which has been attempted in the identification of ‘minsters’ or ‘secular estate centres’ that is most problematic. It could make equal sense to see some small religious communities, which we might choose to define as *monasteria*, as intimately involved on many secular estates. In others, the privileges in independence and exemption of renders and services may have made the foundation of *monasteria* naturally appealing to aristocratic families; for Bede these financial concessions were, of course, the whole *raison d’être* for the establishment of many smaller ‘false’ houses. Intimate involvement is frequently reflected in the familial nature of many *monasteria*, seen most clearly in their ruling figures and, in the larger and especially royal houses, their frequent association with administrative centres.¹⁶²

Changes in early Germanic society, first indicated by increased stratification in burial ritual, reached their ultimate expression in the Sutton Hoo mound one ship burial. Not only did this deposit indicate a conscious desire for *romanitas*, with the very costume and jewellery of the occupant recreating the dress of an

¹⁵⁷ *EHD*, i, no. 170.

¹⁵⁸ Hadden and Stubbs (eds), *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents*, iii, p. 364.

¹⁵⁹ Stevenson (ed.), *Creeds, Councils and Controversies*, no. 24 p. 360. I am grateful to Teresa Hall for this reference.

¹⁶⁰ It is perhaps unsurprising therefore that ‘corrupt’ establishments dominated by lay society were not terminologically distinguished from ‘regular’ houses in contemporary documents, as Sarah Foot has pointed out: ‘Anglo-Saxon minsters: a review of terminology’, p. 221.

¹⁶¹ Cambridge and Rollason, ‘The pastoral organization’, p. 91.

¹⁶² Blair, ‘Anglo-Saxon minsters: a topographical review’, p. 231; Thacker, ‘Monks, preaching and pastoral care’, p. 139.

emperor;¹⁶³ the status indicates an access to, and control of, resources. Protecting this control could be indicated symbolically with rich but isolated burial mounds acting as territorial markers (as for instance Taplow – Teappa's *hlaw* or mound¹⁶⁴). Achieving control of resources required administrative centres which could act both as places to receive agricultural renders and as production and trading sites. Facilitating these tasks frequently required access to riverine and ultimately maritime traffic. Such developments are to be seen most clearly in the development of *emporia* in this crucial period, which marked the transition from a gift-exchange society to surplus-producing kingdoms controlled by families with increasingly coercive powers.¹⁶⁵ These brought ever-closer trading links to add to the political and royal ties that existed within a Christian Francia that had a far stronger continuity with the Roman past.¹⁶⁶

If kingship has consistently been seen as the mechanism for the establishment of *emporia* such as Ipswich and *Hamwic*, it remains a curious anachronism that discussion of smaller production and exchange centres, exemplified by 'productive' sites, should be explained overwhelmingly in terms of the Church's influence.¹⁶⁷ The pattern of 'productive' sites within East Anglia, to the south-east (the known heartland of the Wuffinga royal family) and to the north-west around the Fenland basin, stands testament to an overwhelmingly economic basis behind their distribution, in which the Lark-Gipping corridor between the two appears to have been crucial.¹⁶⁸ Given the pre-Christian origins to the Wuffing family's rise, can the Church be accorded the sole influence in the development of sites such as Wormegay or Brandon? Ely exemplifies the problem, having been a royal estate and indeed subsequently acting as the base from which Hereward the Wake was to rebel in the years after the Norman Conquest. Its religious foundation can be seen in a readily explicable political context, in which it acted as a symbolic institution in a frontier zone disputed between Mercia and East Anglia, and in which the original *monasterium* described by Bede had become a community of male clerics at some time unknown, certainly by the tenth century. This is a more proactive use of an island site than the picture of isolation usually presented by ecclesiastical sources. Even the liminal marshy idealism may have been over-exaggerated and Morris has suggested that frequently this may be seen as no more than a monastic *topos*.¹⁶⁹ The 'productive' sites of East Anglia all demand to be seen in this proactive sense, stressing their access to waterways. Brandon has access to the Little Ouse, Burrow Hill the Butley River, Wormegay the River Nar and Bawsey the River Gaywood. Even if the concept of a *vallum monasterii* can be maintained as a physical as well as a mental construction, as we have seen,

¹⁶³ Filmer-Sankey, 'The Roman emperor'.

¹⁶⁴ Ekwall, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-names*, p. 460.

¹⁶⁵ Hodges, 'Rebirth of towns', p. 4.

¹⁶⁶ Wood, 'Franks and Sutton Hoo'. An immediate symbol of this political and economic contact was the production of coinage in the Merovingian world, both tremisses and solidi being struck under royal control and having the cross adopted as the usual reverse motif. These designs subsequently influenced insular and northern European coinage: Grierson and Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage 1*, pp. 156–64; Hines, 'Coins and runes', pp. 48–9.

¹⁶⁷ Ulmschneider, *Markets, Minsters and Metal-Detectors*, pp. 105–6.

¹⁶⁸ Newman, 'Exceptional finds, exceptional sites?', p. 108.

¹⁶⁹ Morris, *Churches in the Landscape*, p. 115.

such barriers were not unique to religious sites. Nor does this approach relate only to the experience of East Anglia; the monastic interpretation for the 'removed' promontory site at Tintagel is now generally rejected in favour of it being a secular aristocratic settlement with wide trading links.¹⁷⁰

It is this essential similarity between secular and religious worlds that makes it both difficult and dangerous to apply singular, and unitary, interpretations to the identification of *monasteria*. In particular, the use of Christianity as a source of power to secular rulers is frequently to be seen, for example, in the baptism of rulers client to other, Christian, overkings; small wonder that Rædwald was a less than enthusiastic convert on his return to East Anglia, after his baptism at Æthelberht of Kent's court.¹⁷¹ Christianity was important in other, subtle, ways, in particular the desire for *romanitas*. It would be unfair to see the Conversion merely as a means of aping Continental, and more specifically, Roman models. At the same time, these were deeply important concepts to the emerging Anglo-Saxon aristocracy.¹⁷² Associations with the powerful organisations of the Roman past and Merovingian present served to empower current elites by conferring a legitimisation of their social position, as Rome's heirs. A potent and prestigious way to demonstrate Christianity and *romanitas* was the foundation of churches, so reinforcing the centrality of secular elites to religious life. The form that this took is less clear.

From the writings of Bede, we have unequivocal evidence for the inmates of *monasteria* living a recognisably 'monastic' life, seen in later foundations to be based on Benedictine precepts. We should also see elements more intimately integrated within society, and within the structures of power based on estate centres.

Such a model provides a ready explanation for the mushrooming of parochial churches as a part of settlement foci as multiple estates fragmented into smaller autonomous parts in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The increase in private churches founded is seen nowhere more clearly than in East Anglia.¹⁷³ Parish churches were usually later implants into these complexes, typically intimately associated with, and integral to, the manorial lord's residence and farm, and often preserved as such, for instance Waxham, Norfolk. The beginnings of this process appear to lie in sites like Whitehouse Road, Bramford, Suffolk, which excavation has shown had a small cemetery of thirteen inhumations within its enclosure, but no church (Fig. 13).¹⁷⁴ Similarly, at Ketton Quarry, Rutland, a settlement

¹⁷⁰ Dark, 'Plan and interpretation of Tintagel'.

¹⁷¹ Æthelberht held *imperium* over the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms south of the Humber, although Bede records that Rædwald was 'even in the lifetime of Æthelberht . . . winning pre-eminence for his own people' (*HE*, ii, 15). Following Æthelberht's death in 616, Rædwald managed to achieve this same measure of control for himself. In renouncing Christianity, Rædwald also rejected Æthelberht's political superiority.

¹⁷² Wormald, 'Bede, *Beowulf* and the Conversion', p. 68.

¹⁷³ Batcock, 'The parish church in Norfolk', p. 179.

¹⁷⁴ Nenke *et al.*, 'Medieval Britain and Ireland in 1995', pp. 284–5; Martin *et al.*, 'Archaeology in Suffolk 1995', pp. 476–9. Two bodies have been radiocarbon dated to cal AD 870–1050 and 890–1020 at the 95% confidence level (Samples OxA–6125, 1055±50 BP and OxA–6126, 1080±35 BP). A curious solitary burial outside the enclosure is dated to cal AD 680–990 at 95% confidence (Sample OxA–6204, 1165±70 BP). I am grateful to Jo Caruth, Suffolk Archaeological Service, for this additional information.

complex dated to between 900–1100 AD on the basis of Stamford ware pottery has been excavated. A single-cell church surrounded by seventy graves arranged in neat rows lay immediately adjacent to at least three timber buildings with no evident boundary between them.¹⁷⁵ Like Middle Anglo-Saxon *monasteria*, the importance of the parish church was as a mark of status, power and ownership; all that had changed was the scale of the enterprise, reflecting an increasingly lower social order now responsible for the foundation and mediating its own message.

For the seventh to the ninth centuries, our understanding of settlement types and forms relies upon a select number of documents, typically written by monastic writers, about monastic houses, frequently *for* monastic houses. It is perhaps understandable that within this, the greater religious institutions are more likely to have left their mark, especially considering which sources – notably Bede – these include. By contrast, the material culture of the period is far less specific, showing a world in which concepts of *romanitas* as much as the Church were influential. This lack of distinction is just one reason why we have such trouble interpreting the nature of early Cheddar, Northampton, Flixborough or Brandon. Indeed, given the clear wealth of the royal and aristocratic families, enabling them to patronise the Church with the largesse they did, it seems strange that we should appear to have so few excavated examples of their own settlements. This is perhaps unsurprising when building complexes like those in Northampton are reinterpreted as monastic. In this case ‘we simply do not possess a range of plans from royal, noble or ecclesiastical contexts which could justify the assertion that halls of a particular size or type were peculiar to kings’.¹⁷⁶ While used to argue that religious institutions might have had halls of this size and style, it seems secular complexes are unable to have churches or chapel buildings attached to them!

In this archaeological confusion, the historical sources typically used to structure interpretation and debate cannot contribute. The danger of such historically structured interpretation has been ably described by David Austin.¹⁷⁷ If the archaeological evidence seems equivocal, it should perhaps be remembered that, as our sources suggest, the nature of religious practice itself could differ and indeed altered over time. Some sites, perhaps many, did indeed see classic concepts of isolation and eremitical life being put into practice. But equally, the suggestion that many *monasteria* co-existed with secular settlements has several points to commend it.

It helps to explain the difficulty in locating the *vallum monasterii* of many communities. It provides a reason for the quantities of small-finds of a purely domestic nature and the presence of much coinage on many sites. It also provides a model for the subsequent twinning of church sites with secular manorial holdings in the later Anglo-Saxon period. The co-existence of *monasteria* with secular centres helps to explain why many ‘minster’ sites developed into towns and why ‘many *burh* towns on non-Roman sites . . . were sited to contain pre-existing

¹⁷⁵ Daniels (ed.), ‘Fieldwork and excavation in 1998’, pp. 46–7.

¹⁷⁶ Blair, ‘Palaces or minsters?’, p. 103.

¹⁷⁷ Austin, ‘“Proper study” of medieval archaeology’.

minsters'.¹⁷⁸ The probability is that they were already acting as secular centres. The prominent location of many sites may be similarly viewed. The presence of both a *monasterium* or a secular estate centre, or indeed the two if coterminous, would be highly desirable in visible settings. Although usually stressed in discussion of church sites, few would claim that secular centres could not be positioned in prominent places such as peninsulas or islands next to navigable water channels. Both, after all, had much to gain from being conspicuous elements in the surrounding countryside. Foremost, it was a palpable sign of the ruling order and hierarchy of society, providing a readily identifiable marker to territories.

These considerations need not lead us to deny the existence of communities that were truly isolated and removed from the secular world, established by the pious on comital estates. The profound changes in Anglo-Saxon society's religious practices are an adequate testament to the proselytising achievements of the Church. People did indeed take up the cross and retire for contemplative lives. The difficulty is using archaeology or historical sources to distinguish them unequivocally. If we are to accept a far more simple proposition – that in many cases secular and religious occupation was coterminous – we have a ready answer to why we have so often failed to find evidence of secular centres consuming material culture in the quality and quantity that must have been available to secular elites. Arguably, the majority of *monasteria* were intimately involved with secular society, giving rise to the wide variety of religious standards that were ultimately to lead to the monastic reform movement of the tenth century under Abbots Dunstan and Æthelwold, conducted under the royal patronage of King Edgar (959–75).¹⁷⁹

Freeing ourselves from viewing each new site singularly as a *monasterium* breaks the vicious circle whereby such new sites provide complimentary examples reiterating the model. A modified paradigm may truly see *monasteria* reflecting 'religious communities . . . diverse in size and character' which could be 'anything from Monkwearmouth or Barking to a head-priest with two or three clerics'.¹⁸⁰ Not only does this tell us something about the workings of secular society; it advocates caution in our interpretation of historical sources. Viewing more widespread integration of secular and ecclesiastical centres does much to support Blair's contention that we may see much greater pastoral presence in the role of Middle Anglo-Saxon *monasteria*, and to reject the model advanced by Cambridge and Rollason for overlapping networks of secular and monastic *monasteria*, for which little direct evidence exists. More immediately, the embedded nature of the Church in secular society was to lead to its quick re-emergence even in the Danelaw at the end of the First Viking Age. Seen in this light of secular co-existence, Blair may, after all, be correct to see Brandon as possibly 'our best example so far of an ordinary small minster'.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Blair, 'Minster churches in the landscape', p. 47.

¹⁷⁹ This intimacy with secular society is perhaps the reason for the increase in episcopal control over *monasteria* in the canons of successive Church Councils up to the time of the Viking invasions. In this context, the monastic reform becomes something of a reaction to the power of the bishops with an increasingly established 'minster' system: Thacker, 'Monks, preaching and pastoral care', pp. 164–5.

¹⁸⁰ Blair, 'Ecclesiastical organization', p. 196.

¹⁸¹ Blair, 'Anglo-Saxon minsters: a topographical review', pp. 262–4.

The First Viking Age and its Consequences for Monasticism in East Anglia

A DOMINANT feature of ninth- and tenth-century English political history is the presence of the Vikings. Nowhere do we hear more clearly about Scandinavian raiding activity than in the sphere of religious life, and David Knowles' assessment that there was 'a complete collapse of monasticism by the end of the ninth century' still stands for some.¹ Examining the impact in East Anglia has always been difficult due to the lack of historical sources for the area,² a silence which has traditionally been taken to reflect the repercussions of the Scandinavians' presence.³ However, reassessing the period is important as it has implications for our understanding of how the Church emerged at the end of the First Viking Age in the tenth century, with its monastic reform.⁴ Consideration is also required of the ways in which social structures and tenurial organisation may have been altered within the region if a mass immigration of Scandinavian settlers also occurred.

There are few truly contemporary accounts for East Anglia in this period and sources such as charters, scarce until the Conquest and often of questionable authenticity, are typically contained as copies in much later monastic cartularies, usually belonging to Ely, Bury St Edmund's and St Benet's Abbeys. A basic chronology may be established through the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, with snippets of local interest supplied in subsequent chronicles, for instance Æthelweard's *Chronicon*, composed 978×988,⁵ and the *Annals of St Neots*, an

¹ Knowles, *Monastic Order in England*, p. 33. For a more recent expression of these sentiments see Abrams, 'Conversion and assimilation', at pp. 141–3.

² None Scandinavian, all Anglo-Saxon or Continental and most ecclesiastical.

³ 'Danes and charters did not get on well together': Rackham, *History of the Countryside*, p. 10.

⁴ The idea of two 'Viking Ages' draws on the distinction first made by Peter Sawyer in 1969, based on historical events: Sawyer, 'Two Viking Ages of Britain'. This separation is in fact a rendering into English of the Scandinavian idea of an Early and Late Viking Age. The First Viking Age in Insular usage may be defined as extending from 793 (the raid on Lindisfarne) to 954 (the end of Scandinavian rule in the kingdom of York). The Second Viking Age dates from c.980 (the renewal of Viking raids on England) to an indeterminate period 'when the defenders of England had mastered the technique of dealing with such mobile bands of invaders': *ibid.*, p. 163. Although Cnut's conquest of England in 1016 could be said to mark the end of this second Age, raids continued to c.1100 and some scholars use it in this latter sense.

⁵ *Chronicon Æthelweardi* is important in supplying details from a lost version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, close to 'A', and from independent sources to which Æthelweard had access; quite what these sources were is not always clear: Bately (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle MS 'A'*, pp. lxxix–lxxxviii. Æthelweard's *Chronicon* is dated by Campbell (ed. and transl.), *Chronicle of Æthelweard*, p. xiii and n. 2, and by Dumville, 'Textual archaeology', p. 49, to 978×988 on the basis that Æthelweard projected a chapter on Æthelred (the Unready) but actually ended with Edgar (d.975).

early twelfth-century Bury St Edmunds chronicle.⁶ To these may be added those of wills, foundation charters and (especially problematic) saints' Lives. From these sources, we learn that the Vikings first overran East Anglia in 865 (s.a. 866 in 'A') before returning in 869 to defeat and kill the East Anglian king, Edmund. Following Edmund's unsuccessful bid to restore political independence to his kingdom, client rule appears to have been exercised,⁷ the Vikings only returning in 880.⁸ Until the conquest of the Danelaw under the West Saxon kings, East Anglia remained a political entity, now characterised as Danish, under the control of King Guthrum. The end of any independence finally came in 917, when 'the entire Danish army in East Anglia swore union' with Edward the Elder.⁹

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE FIRST VIKING AGE

If the region's political orientation is reasonably clear, its ethnic composition remains a matter of scholarly contention. Because political control and patronage had in the past been central to the life of the Church, and with an essential similarity between secular and religious estate centres focussed at the aristocratic level of Anglo-Saxon society, the potential for dislocation by Vikings was especially high. However, the *raison d'être* of the Church was the salvation of human souls. Arguably of equal importance to the foundation and patronage of institutions serving the laity was the grassroots support which it enjoyed among a population which also required ministering to. The possibility of a fundamental shift in the nature of society, with an Anglo-Saxon population replaced or supplemented by a substantial Scandinavian one, might have threatened this very basis of the Church's existence, even more so than the desecration and robbery of raiding.¹⁰

⁶ The *Annals of St Neots* contains accounts whose authority is unclear, making it 'most difficult evidence to handle': Dumville and Lapidge (eds), *The Annals of St Neots*, p. lxiii; Whitelock, 'Fact and fiction', p. 224. A Bury St Edmunds origin to the annals would make it unsurprising to find the recording of oral traditions in circulation there, as well as possibly legends now otherwise unwitnessed.

⁷ Edmund's coinage is difficult to date but appears to have ended c.869. Thereafter, the coinage is known of two kings, Æthelred and Oswald, of a similar style to earlier East Anglian types, but apparently struck after 870. Three examples come from the Cuerdale hoard, deposited c.905, implying a date in the last three decades of the ninth century. They would fit in well between Edmund's coinage (up to 869) and Guthrum's (of the later 880s on): Grierson and Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage 1*, pp. 294 and 318; Blackburn, 'Expansion and control', pp. 125–7.

⁸ This whole question of chronology is extremely complex. Coinage was being struck in East Anglia for much (probably all) of the period from Beonna (c.749–760: Archibald, 'Coinage of Beonna', p. 33) to Edmund. However, the periodic overlordship of the kingdom by the Mercians makes it difficult to know the exact number of East Anglian kings and the length of their reigns (see for instance Table 21 in Grierson and Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage 1*, p. 269). The East Anglian mint did, though, pass to its own independent rulers from c.827 under Æthelstan (Pagan, 'Coinage of the East Anglian kingdom', p. 42) and remained under them until the Viking conquest of 869. Edmund's earlier coinage is distinguished by the legend +EADMUND REX AN (for *Anglorum*, 'of the Angles'), but the combination of types used by each moneyer has hindered any more satisfactory chronology of the coinage within the reigns (Grierson and Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage 1*, p. 294). Edmund appears to have succeeded a King Æthelweard but the conventional date of his accession, 855, is based only on the tradition of the *Annals of St Neots*.

⁹ Garmonsway (ed. and transl.), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, p. 103. A useful, though rather dated, discussion of the political situation is Davis, 'East Anglia and the Danelaw'.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the debate over a mass migration of Scandinavian settlers see Trafford, 'Ethnicity,

The First Viking Age and its consequences

Debate over the extent of Scandinavianisation has always polarised views. While the late Sue Margeson argued for large numbers of immigrants to East Anglia, Peter Warner has made the remarkable statement for Suffolk that ‘although well documented . . . [the Danes] must remain a figment of the imagination of nineteenth-century antiquarians’.¹¹

There are two principal elements to the problem, namely the extent to which the First Viking Age brought about a discontinuity with the past, and the scope given by Viking conquest for large-scale peasant immigration into the Danelaw areas. The evidence bearing upon these questions is substantially linguistic and archaeological, of which the linguistic, more specifically place-name evidence, has long been the central plank for those proposing intense settlement.

Place-name evidence

East Anglia, like other Danelaw areas, has long been recognised as having many Scandinavian place-name elements, Sue Margeson calling them ‘the most concrete testimony to the Vikings’ presence in Norfolk’ (Fig. 15).¹² The most notable cluster is on the old island of Flegg in east Norfolk where the concentration of place-names ending in *-by* (‘village’ or ‘settlement’) is dramatic, representing for Margeson ‘evidence of the first wave of colonisation proper’.¹³ Karl-Inge Sandred has interpreted this concentration as indicating new settlement on second-rate marshy land, previously uninhabited because the better arable areas had already been well settled by the indigenous Anglo-Saxon population.¹⁴ In common with other Danelaw areas, two more place-name elements are visible. The earliest of these is the so-called ‘Grimston hybrid’ where Old English settlement-name elements like *-tūn* (‘settlement’ or ‘farm’) are compounded with Scandinavian personal names, such as ‘Grim’. The latest place-name type is that ending in *-þorp*, for places of minor importance, often adjuncts to main areas of settlement.¹⁵ It has been suggested that the sheer number of Scandinavian forms encountered can only be explained if indigenous word-forms had been swept away by a large new population speaking a different language. On the face of it, place-names would seem to provide powerful evidence of an immigrant population, the gaps in Scandinavian-named settlements being filled by an even more widespread pattern of field-names, for instance in the fields of the Deben valley of Suffolk, which have many Scandinavian elements. This situation appears to be found elsewhere, for instance in Lincolnshire.¹⁶

migration, theory and historiography’. On the question of conversion and the religious needs of occupants of Danelaw territories, see Abrams, ‘Conversion and assimilation’ and ‘Conversion of the Danelaw’. For more general discussion of the implications of conquest see Hadley, ‘Conquest, colonisation and the Church’.

¹¹ Margeson, ‘Viking settlement’; Warner, *Origins of Suffolk*, p. 208.

¹² Margeson, ‘Viking settlement’, p. 49.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁴ Sandred, ‘Vikings in Norfolk’.

¹⁵ Williamson, *Origins of Norfolk*, p. 109.

¹⁶ For Suffolk see Dyke *et al.*, *Deben Valley Place-names* and Arnott, *The Place-Names of the Deben Valley Parishes*, pp. xii–xiv. For Lincolnshire see Fellows-Jensen, ‘English field-names’. For a more

Landscapes of Monastic Foundation

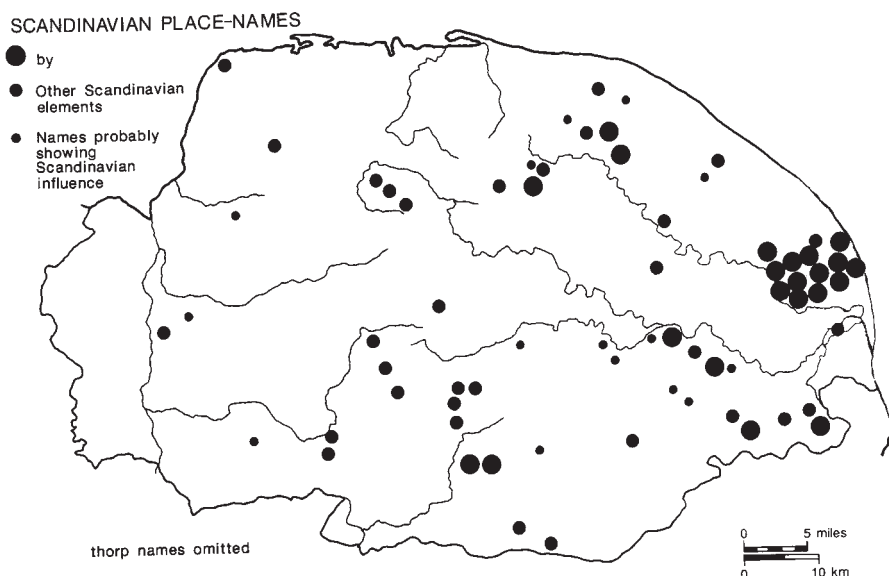


Fig. 15. Scandinavian place-name forms in Norfolk (after Wade-Martins (ed.), *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk*, no. 17).

However, this view is complicated by the fact that nearly all the place-names are first documented some two hundred years later in Domesday Book. Since many more place-names of Scandinavian form first appear even later, sometimes centuries after Domesday, it is by no means certain that characteristically Scandinavian name-forms are the result of ninth-century mass population change.¹⁷ The Second Viking Age and Cnut's conquest of England provided further stimuli for Scandinavian influence in place-names, and Fellows-Jensen has even suggested that the (Scandinavian) names of eleventh-century tenants and owners may have been substituted for earlier names, with the suffixes of *-þorp* and *-tūn* remaining.¹⁸ This is not the place to discuss the causes of language change, but the debate provoked by the issue has shown that there is no clear reason for place-name change to have been the simple consequence of mass-migration occurring at one point in time.¹⁹ Perhaps more important is Sawyer's suggestion

general discussion of place-names in Lincolnshire see Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Lincolnshire*, pp. 102–15, especially at pp. 102–4.

¹⁷ Sawyer, *Kings and Vikings*, p. 100 and *Anglo-Saxon Lincolnshire*, pp. 105–6. A recent example of the difficulties is given in Tania Styles' discussion of *Appel-garth* ('orchard') place-names, the earliest example of which is first attested in the mid-twelfth century and for which, despite its apparent Old Norse headword (*apaldr(s)-garðr*) 'there is nothing . . . that allows us to trace the compound back further than early Middle English . . . the Applegarths might be entirely Scandinavian, partly Scandinavian, or not very Scandinavian at all': Styles, 'Scandinavian elements in English place-names', pp. 289–92.

¹⁸ Fellows-Jensen, 'Danish place-names', p. 140.

¹⁹ A case argued by Lucy, 'Early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries of East Yorkshire', who has sought to minimise a Germanic immigration in the fifth century. Page has considered the epigraphical evidence to show 'little use of the Scandinavian tongues, and a small effect on English epigraphical practice, facts to be noted in discussing the size and importance of Viking settlements in this country': Page, 'How long did the Scandinavian language survive', p. 181. See also Trafford, 'Ethnicity, migration, theory and historiography', pp. 31–2.

The First Viking Age and its consequences

that Scandinavian names reflect the break-up of great estates rather than fresh settlement.²⁰ The potential significance of this process in Norfolk has also been stressed by Tom Williamson, since many Scandinavian elements are in locations peripheral to Anglo-Saxon settlement. This probably indicates these were places first established or attaining tenurial independence after the late ninth century.²¹ Signs of this growing independence of outlying settlements appear in the tenth-century origins to many parochial churches and the accompanying practice of burial in their churchyards.²² Finally, the Viking elite might reasonably be expected to have taken over the estates of their East Anglian aristocratic predecessors. These established places have retained their Anglo-Saxon name-forms. The shift towards Scandinavian word-forms and place-names therefore probably occurred over a longer period than a ninth-century mass immigration.²³ In this desire among the wider population to adopt Scandinavian word forms, 'fashion' may have been an important structuring element, in much the same way that Norman names were adopted by the English peasantry in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.²⁴

Viking material culture

Given the difficulties attendant upon the toponymic evidence, those seeking to demonstrate large-scale Scandinavian immigration have, understandably, sought distinct forms of 'Viking' material culture, and in particular Scandinavian dress accessories such as brooches. An explosion in the number of metal finds being recovered through metal-detection has done much to provide possible evidence for this and the ten-fold increase in Viking-period finds from across Norfolk demonstrated, for Margeson, 'a far more densely populated county than has previously been supposed'.²⁵ If place-names were indeed to indicate areas of especial Scandinavian settlement, it might be thought that Viking metal finds would cluster in those same areas, particularly the former island of Flegg. In fact, the converse is true and the findspots detailed by Margeson have a notable gap in north-east Norfolk.²⁶ There are further flaws to this pure culture-historical argument. Discussing 'Viking' metalwork fails to make any distinction between the crucial ninth- or early tenth-century material which was possibly worn by immigrants, and later styles of material which were more likely to have been copied,

²⁰ Sawyer, *Kings and Vikings*, p. 104.

²¹ Williamson, *Origins of Norfolk*, pp. 109–9. Settlement of previously marginal areas, which came to have Scandinavian place-name elements, has also been argued for in Cumbria by Fellows-Jensen: 'Scandinavian settlement in Cumbria and Dumfriesshire', pp. 77–80.

²² Morris, *Churches in the Landscape*.

²³ A recent review of this thorny problem is Parsons, 'How long did the Scandinavian language survive?'

²⁴ Williamson, *Origins of Norfolk*, p. 109. As an example of this fashion we have Thurstan, whose will of 1043×1045 recorded bequests to Ely, Bury and St Benet's Abbeys. Thurstan is an anglicised form of the Old Icelandic *Þorsteinn*, but Thurstan can be identified with a family of English political allegiance (if not necessarily blood), and to be the great-grandson of Ealdorman Byrhtnoth, killed at the Battle of Maldon in 991: Whitelock (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, No. 31.

²⁵ Margeson, 'Viking settlement', p. 48.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52 and fig. 3. The Isle of Flegg is remarkable for its relative lack of settlement evidence from this date generally.

traded or worn by indigenous people, reflecting an adoption of fashions and the social construction of identity and ethnicity.²⁷ An explicit indication that this was indeed happening is revealed in a tenth- or eleventh-century letter, by an unknown author, in which he berates a man called Edward for

abandoning the English practices which your fathers followed, and in loving the practices of heathen men . . . you dress in Danish fashion with bared necks and blinded eyes. I will say no more about that shameful mode of dress.²⁸

Similarly, no comparative study has been made to investigate the quantity and distribution of purely 'Anglo-Saxon' forms of metalwork of a contemporary date compared to that in Scandinavian style.

A more obvious difficulty with the material evidence is the sheer lack of 'Viking' burials known from East Anglia, which comprise only a male and female from Santon Downham; a male from West Harling; and graves at Gooderstone and Saffron Walden, Essex.²⁹ Similarly, it may be anticipated that large numbers of Scandinavian immigrants might have brought with them distinctive building forms, notably the long bow-sided halls known from many contemporary settlements within Scandinavia, such as at Vorbasse, Næs, Lejre and Tissø in Denmark.³⁰ While it is true that 'there is a paucity of any excavated rural settlements of the ninth and tenth centuries from the Danelaw',³¹ no evidence for Viking-style buildings in England has yet been identified.³² This is of additional interest given the way that such building forms may have allowed the construction or reiteration of a Scandinavian cultural identity if so desired, just as could using specific brooch forms. Perhaps the best opportunity for identifying an ethnic Scandinavian presence will come from those odd places that have yielded a cluster of Scandinavian-style objects rather than single stray finds. As an example, one field at Attleborough in Norfolk has recently yielded a 'Viking' weight, a Thor's hammer amulet and a Borre-Jellinge style brooch close together, with a few other contemporary insular metal items (Plate 4).³³

²⁷ For a discussion of different forms of material culture being used for social differentiation see Halsall, 'Viking presence in England?', especially at pp. 268–72.

²⁸ The letter is, unusually, written in the vernacular and was copied into the eleventh-century Worcester Abbey manuscript, Oxford Bodleian MS Hatton 115, a volume of vernacular homilies. The letter is printed by Kluge (ed.), 'Fragment eines Angelsächsischen briefes', pp. 62–3 and translated as *EHD* i, no. 232.

²⁹ Shetelig, *Viking Antiquities*, p. 12; Rogerson, *A Late Neolithic, Saxon and Medieval Site*, pp. 24–5; Richards, *Viking Age England*, p. 112; Margeson, 'An introduction to the Vikings', p. 20. In a wider frame, Richards has stated that 'it is one of the most remarkable aspects of Viking Age England that despite several centuries of Scandinavian settlement there are very few Viking graves . . . for the ninth and tenth centuries there are less than twenty-five known burial sites in England which have been described as Scandinavian': *Viking Age England*, p. 142. See also Graham-Campbell, 'Pagan Scandinavian burial', pp. 110–15, who enumerates a number of other less convincing candidates.

³⁰ Hvass, 'Vorbasse'; Jørgensen, 'Manor and market at Lake Tissø', pp. 178–83.

³¹ Richards, 'Finding the Vikings', p. 269.

³² This also appears to be the case in even the more heavily Norse-settled north coast of Scotland, where 'considerably more Late Norse sites are known than from the earlier Viking period': Graham-Campbell and Batey, *Vikings in Scotland*, p. 179. Instead, there appears to have been an increasing Scandinavian influence in building styles by the 'Later Norse' period, that is, after c.1050, the same time that better-documented mass-settlement took place there.

³³ Norfolk SMR 36681. I am grateful to the finder, Mr Neil Donmall, for the opportunity to examine these

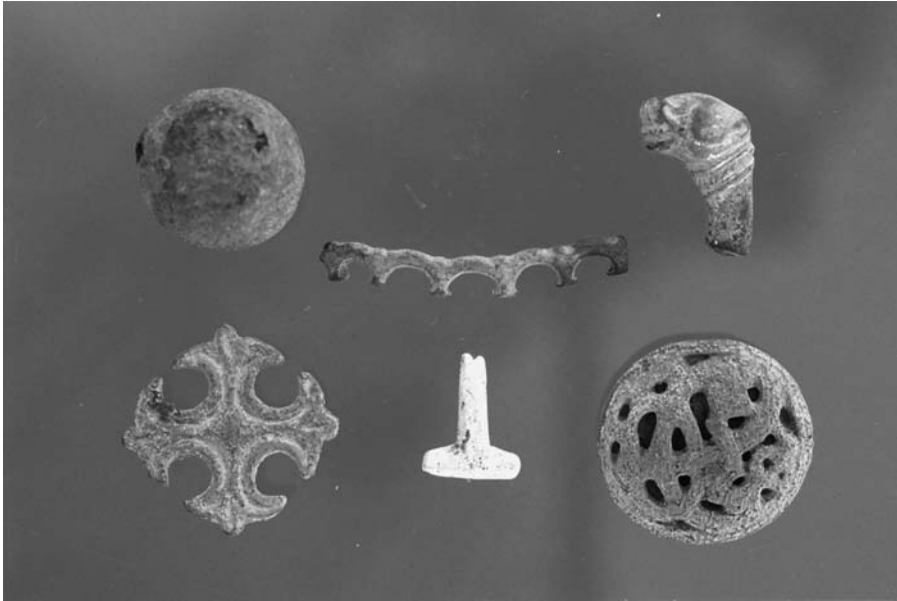


Plate 4. Metal finds from Attleborough, Norfolk. Top row, left to right: 'Viking' weight; cast strip of arcading, date uncertain but with affinities to tenth-century metal-work; twelfth- or thirteenth-century cast and gilt copper-alloy basset hound head, probably a casket fitting. Bottom row, left to right: Equal-arm cross brooch, ninth to tenth century date; cast lead Thor's hammer; Borre-Jelling-style composite brooch.

That there is Viking Scandinavian material culture from ninth-century England is clear from excavations at Repton, where a Mercian *monasterium* and royal mausoleum had been fortified into an encampment, convincingly identifiable with the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*'s record of a Viking army overwintering there in 873–4.³⁴ Similarly, just over two miles away, a Viking barrow cemetery at Heath Wood, Ingleby, containing fifty-nine graves of Scandinavian type, has been excavated.³⁵ The unique character of these two sites emphasizes how tenuous is the material basis for arguing either for, or against, large numbers of Vikings or subsequent Scandinavian settlers elsewhere. While Richards has proposed that the Ingleby barrows might show the Vikings using pagan burial practices as an ethnic identifier, in much the same way that Carver has argued for the use of ship burial at Sutton Hoo in an earlier period,³⁶ there is no general

objects. The weight is globular, of characteristic Scandinavian form with good parallels, for instance from Coppergate, York: Mainman and Rogers, *Craft, Industry and Everyday Life*, pp. 2561–4. See also below, n. 67. The brooch finds a near-identical parallel from a tenth-century context in Dublin: National Museum of Ireland, *Viking and Medieval Dublin*, cat. no. 6, SF E43: 2086. From surrounding place-names, the Attleborough site appears to have been an early common-edge settlement (Andrew Rogerson pers. comm.). This might fit a picture of secondary settlement, here involving Scandinavians, colonising an area marginal to the older established centres of occupation.

³⁴ Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle, 'Repton and the Vikings' and 'Repton and the great heathen army'.

³⁵ Richards *et al.*, 'Viking barrow cemetery at Heath Wood', p. 58, and Richards, 'Boundaries and cult centres'.

³⁶ Carver, *Sutton Hoo – Burial Ground of Kings?*, pp. 104–6.

evidence testifying to the presence, let alone the numbers, of Scandinavian immigrants.

The more we reduce our estimates of the size of an immigrant population, the easier it becomes to explain how even a victorious pagan community might have been so rapidly converted to Christianity. Indeed, we can more readily picture the absorption of these incomers within a Christian native population continuing to require the spiritual support of the Church. However, local continuity of this kind appears at odds with the more usual picture of discontinuity in the life of the Church within the First Viking Age.

EVIDENCE FOR A VIKING IMPACT ON THE CHURCH

Perhaps the most obvious suggestion of disruption and discontinuity in the region is the paucity of pre-Viking Age documentary evidence. For instance, the episcopal lists of the East Anglian bishops of *Dommoc* and Elmham are known in their earliest period only from their insertion into a compilation of Mercian documents c.790,³⁷ while poor documentation leaves us with only very fragmentary evidence for the last bishops before 869. At *Dommoc* there is a twenty-five year gap between the end of Wilred's episcopacy and the appearance of his successor, Æthelwald (845×870); indeed, Æthelwald is known only from his profession and his date of death is unknown.³⁸ At Elmham, Hunberht's episcopacy (accession 816×824) is known with any certainty only up to 845. After these two figures, episcopal provision is next heard of in the region in the period 942×951 through the will of Theodred, bishop of London. Pastoral care appears to have been delivered via his 'footstool' at Hoxne, despite the West Saxon conquest of the East Anglian Danelaw occurring in about 917.³⁹ Indeed, it is only from 955 that a 'bishop of the East Angles' began to be attested.⁴⁰

Understanding the fate of the region's religious institutions is more difficult, given the general lack of evidence for their pre-Viking existence. This is demonstrated most strikingly at Ely in the house chronicle *Liber Eliensis*, written 1169×1174. Although the *Liber*'s author had access to earlier Anglo-Saxon materials, notably the late tenth-century *Libellus Æthelwoldi episcopi*, translated from the vernacular 1109×1131, the abbey's early history consists simply of a description of its foundress Æthelthryth and her scions in Book One, up to chapter 37, before the story jumps to the appearance of the Vikings in chapter 38. This might indicate Ely's destruction or complete abandonment, the pre-Viking account being structured by information available elsewhere, notably in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*.⁴¹ Certainly, it would be strange if any earlier privileges or

³⁷ A paucity of evidence which heightens the contrast with Dorothy Whitelock's assessment that the region was not apparently behind the rest of the country in ecclesiastical provision or achievement: Whitelock, 'Pre-Viking Age Church in East Anglia', p. 19.

³⁸ Richter (ed.), *Canterbury Professions*, no. 28.

³⁹ Whitelock, 'Some Anglo-Saxon bishops'.

⁴⁰ Rigold, 'Bishops of the Re-established See', p. 7.

⁴¹ Dumville, *Wessex and England*, pp. 31–3; Ridyard, *Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 181–7.

land-grants which had survived were not mentioned. Alternatively, the emphasis upon the earliest abbesses may reflect the author's interest in them as a counter-point to the role of Æthelwold, as refounder, who was venerated by the Ely community in the twelfth century.⁴²

It is virtually impossible to identify the destruction of *monasteria* by the Vikings archaeologically. Several high-status sites such as Brandon or Burrow Hill in Suffolk appear to end in the ninth century; Brandon has yielded only small quantities of Thetford ware while Burrow Hill apparently had none.⁴³ This is not the same as demonstrating a violent end. Indeed, one of the interesting features of Flixborough in Humberside is the changing character of settlement in the Late Anglo-Saxon period, the material culture of which was less visible archaeologically.⁴⁴ The difficulty in using archaeology is further exacerbated by the problems of distinguishing between secular and religious estate centres.⁴⁵ A raiding army might be expected to have exploited secular estate centres just as freely as religious ones, and Yorke has observed that the major Viking engagements were fought at royal villas,

presumably because the Viking leaders knew that these were the centres from which the surrounding countryside was managed and where the king's *feorm* would be collected and stored.⁴⁶

Since the patchy nature of our sources means that few of the named *monasteria* in East Anglia can be identified with certainty (for instance *Icanho*, *Cnobheresburg* and *Dommoc*), we cannot be sure whether these sites lived out their natural lifespan or were destroyed by the Vikings. Equally uncertain is the extent to which raiding may have extinguished religious or monastic life.

The question of discontinuity in the Church has been explored by many scholars. In discussing the liturgical practices of the English Church from the eighth to the tenth century, David Dumville has seen a decline in book-production in the period of known Viking raids that contrasts strikingly with the situation in the eighth and tenth centuries. Similarly, he has seen aspects of discontinuity in the scriptoria of Lindisfarne and Canterbury, but continuity in the more western *monasterium* at Worcester, which suggests it was less disrupted by Viking activity.⁴⁷ Except for Felix's *Life of St Guthlac* (714×749), there is a lack of any certain pre-Viking Age East Anglian texts found either subsequently in houses of the region, or in other later monastic libraries elsewhere in the country.⁴⁸ Again,

⁴² A possible parallel is the history of Abingdon, Æthelwold's first major appointment. This abbey probably owed its greatness to the patronage of King Æthelstan (924–39), yet as Alan Thacker has pointed out, he hardly features in house tradition. Æthelstan's church was not monastic and so it was the pre-Viking community that was of more interest to the monastery's historians: Thacker, 'Æthelwold and Abingdon', p. 46.

⁴³ Carr *et al.*, 'Middle Saxon settlement at Staunton Meadow'; Fenwick, 'Insula de Burgh', pp. 38–9.

⁴⁴ Loveluck, 'Wealth, waste and conspicuous consumption', p. 119.

⁴⁵ For instance, Dunstan's hagiographer 'B' describes Glastonbury as *insula regalis*, raising the question of the extent to which this was a royal proprietary church in the early tenth century, and it is unclear what distinction (if any) there was between royal and abbatial lands: Abrams, *Anglo-Saxon Glastonbury*, p. 7.

⁴⁶ Yorke, *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 109.

⁴⁷ Dumville, *Liturgy and the Ecclesiastical History of Late Anglo-Saxon England*.

⁴⁸ A possible exception is the 'Red Book of Eye', belonging to the post-Conquest priory there. Supposedly

this suggests a lack of religious continuity coincident with the arrival of Vikings.⁴⁹

However, even after the First Viking Age, the quantity of written material that survives from East Anglia of pre-mid-eleventh-century date is small. Compared with other regions, this lack of documentation is as frustrating as it is remarkable, and its reappearance seems to have much to do with the establishment of Benedictine abbeys at Bury St Edmunds and Holm St Benet's. The absence of sources for the tenth century therefore probably requires an explanation beyond simply renewed Viking raiding.

A more fundamental consideration has been made by Robin Fleming and responded to by David Dumville, concerning the basis of religious communities' existence – their landholdings.⁵⁰ Both agree that Viking onslaughts must have been responsible for the destruction of many *monasteria* although they differ in their interpretations of the consequences of this. For Fleming, Viking incursions allowed the West Saxon crown to alienate many formerly monastic landholdings, enriching the monarchy and allowing the patronage of royal officials, effectively buying their loyalty and services. Dumville has rightly taken issue with the bases of many of Fleming's arguments, principally her use of often very late and spurious monastic charters as evidence of houses' former landholdings which the Domesday Book shows were in secular hands by 1066.⁵¹ Both do agree that a consequence of the Viking invasions was that much formerly ecclesiastical land appears to have passed into the hands of the laity.⁵² And while William of Malmesbury, in his *De Gestis Pontificum Anglorum* (written c.1125), described Glastonbury as *desolatus* after a visit by Vikings, a small number of late ninth- and early tenth-century house charters seems to indicate the continued existence there of some form of community.⁵³ Certainly, the young Dunstan, born c.909, was apparently able to use a considerable library remaining at Glastonbury as a

owned by Felix, first bishop of East Anglia, the gospel-book is known only from the tradition of John Leland although some have attempted, unconvincingly, to make positive identifications with surviving manuscripts. This does not, of course, mean that East Anglian traditions did not survive, as witnessed by the list of *Dommoc* and Elmham bishops. Similarly, Newton has argued that *Beowulf* may have been composed and existed in manuscript form during the eighth century in an Anglian kingdom, even though the present unique manuscript (BL, MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv) dates from c.1000: Newton, *Origins of Beowulf*, p. 17. On the date see also Dumville, 'Beowulf come lately'.

⁴⁹ The difficulty lies in closely dating the provenance of these valuable items at various points; if an eighth-century book had migrated from, for instance, Northumbria to the South by the tenth century, there are three possible explanations. The manuscript might have travelled as a result of pressure on religious communities who moved during the First Viking Age; the book might have travelled as a consequence of subsequent political contacts between rulers; or, alternatively, the book could have been part of a donation of materials in the context of religious renewal: Dumville, *Liturgy and the Ecclesiastical History*, p. 103.

⁵⁰ Fleming, 'Monastic lands and England's defence'; Dumville, *Wessex and England*, pp. 29–54.

⁵¹ Fleming also describes several monasteries as destroyed by the Vikings despite there being no substantial evidence for their foundation at this period, for instance Holm St Benet's and St Neot's: Fleming, 'Monastic lands and England's defence', p. 248.

⁵² A similar situation occurred on the Continent. See for instance Le Maho, 'Fate of the ports', pp. 234–47.

⁵³ Abrams, *Anglo-Saxon Glastonbury*, p. 7. This may have been similar to the better continuity for which Dumville has argued at Worcester in this period, due to its western location: *Liturgy and the Ecclesiastical History*, p. 105.

young man.⁵⁴ The *monasteria* at Titchfield and Worcester also survived, while a number of pre-Viking Age documents lie behind the *Medeshamstede Memoranda* and other, forged, Peterborough charters of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, suggesting the survival of some muniments in this Eastern house.⁵⁵ At Abingdon, too, some survival is indicated. The first recension of the *Abingdon Chronicle* (written before 1117) records King Alfred as having ‘violently seized the vill in which the abbey was sited . . . with all its appurtenances’ immediately after Viking attacks. Abingdon’s chronicler was also at pains to stress that the abbey’s charters and holy relics had been hidden and preserved.⁵⁶ Finally, at Wimborne in Dorset, a double foundation for monks and nuns established c.718 by King Ine appears to have survived since the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records, s.a. 901, the West Saxon prince Æthelwold abducting a woman from there ‘in defiance of the command of the bishops, because she had taken the vows of a nun’.⁵⁷

Repton provides a dramatic archaeological example for survival. This seventh-century Mercian royal *monasterium* was literally overrun in 873 when the *here* ‘went from Lindsey to Repton, and there took winter quarters’.⁵⁸ While excavations have revealed Scandinavian burials and the remains of a small defensive circuit, the church not only survived, but remained wealthy up to the Norman Conquest.⁵⁹ Here is evidence of exactly the sort Robin Fleming would have liked for other monastic sites, but showing the opposite, a site that maintained its religious character and communal life.

Evidence of this sort demonstrates the care with which a biased historical record needs to be approached. Just as William of Malmesbury described Glastonbury as *desolatus*, so the same fate is repeated elsewhere by innumerable other historians and chroniclers. Such accounts are, however, characteristically no earlier than the later tenth century and are often twelfth-century in date or later. Through them, writers were able to emphasise the sense of spiritual rebirth brought to sites by (typically) Benedictine refoundations. Again, this process is found on the Continent despite often good evidence for the continuity of religious institutions. Viking involvement may also have helped to legitimate the

⁵⁴ Dunstan’s biographer ‘B’, §5, speaks of him darting ‘through many fields of sacred and religious volumes, with the rapid course of an able mind’ as well as diligently studying the books Irish pilgrims and other wise men brought with them to Glastonbury: *EHD*, i, no. 234; Stubbs (ed.), *Memorials of St Dunstan*, p. 10.

⁵⁵ Yorke, *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 113; Stenton, ‘Medeshamstede and its colonies’, pp. 179–80; Peterson, ‘Studies in the Early History’, pp. 102–48.

⁵⁶ Thacker, ‘Æthelwold and Abingdon’, p. 45.

⁵⁷ Garmonsway (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, p. 92.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁵⁹ As implied by the mention of a church with two priests and one plough in Domesday Book, in contrast to the general lack of other churches or priests for the Derbyshire returns: *GDB*, fol. 272v. Repton was a six-carucate royal estate held by Earl Ælfgar in 1066, to which belonged land in Winhill, Staffs., and the soke of Ticknall: *GDB*, fols 272v, 273 and 278. Significantly, an Augustinian priory was founded at Repton by Maud, countess of Chester c.1153–9: Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses*, pp. 171–2. For the refoundation of Anglo-Saxon communities as Norman monasteries see Chapter 5, pp. 194–9. For the excavations at Repton see Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle, ‘Repton and the Vikings’ and ‘Repton and the great heathen army’, p. 87.

acquisition of other communities' relics in the guise of their being transported to a safe location, as in Neustria.⁶⁰

In both England and on the Continent, Viking destruction seems to have become an essential *topos* for those writing the history of a monastic house and was probably a seductive explanation where there was a lack of any early documentation. The evidence upon which these later writers asserted destruction is less tangible and in some cases seems to have been clear invention.⁶¹ On balance, the evidence speaks more of the Church's national organisational structure being severely dislocated, as well as some individual local institutions being extinguished. More seriously, our understanding of 'destruction' has been highly structured by the loss of documents. The possible asset-stripping of institutions need not have caused a collapse in spiritual life, and there is very little evidence for missionary activity being undertaken in the Danelaw area following its conquest.⁶²

A CONTINUITY IN RELIGIOUS LIFE?

Perhaps the most decisive instance of the survival and triumph of Christianity in East Anglia is the birth and growth of the cult of St Edmund. The traditions surrounding the origin of the foundation housing his relics at Bury are unclear and shrouded in legend,⁶³ but the appearance of a coinage specifically commemorating the dead East Anglian king is of the highest importance because it constitutes direct contemporary evidence for Edmund's cult.⁶⁴ Unusually for an area conquered by the Vikings, within a short time of their settlement coins were being minted.⁶⁵ Several contemporary hoards exhibit evidence of probable Scandinavian ownership. For instance, 'peck-marks' (testing a coin's silver content by nicking it with a knife) can be seen on 26 of the 71 coins (31.6%) from the Ashdon hoard, Essex, deposited c.890–95.⁶⁶ The proportion of coins tested rises further if bent examples are counted, resistance to bending also being used as a way of assessing silver purity; seven, possibly nine, coins were so treated.⁶⁷ Despite this apparent mistrust of coinage, its production was quickly resumed, demonstrating

⁶⁰ Potts, 'When the saints go marching', pp. 21–2; Lifshitz, 'Migration of Neustrian relics'.

⁶¹ As appears to have been the case at Thorney Abbey, Cambs., and Holm St Benet's, Norfolk. See pp. 137 and 145–6.

⁶² The letter of Pope Formosus to the bishops of England is an exception: *EHD*, i, no. 227. Certainly there is nothing like the 'handbook' of twenty-three texts, including the stories of the conversion of St Paul and the Frankish Clovis, which Archbishop Herve of Rheims sent to Guy, archbishop of Rouen c.914, following the ceding of the area to Vikings under Rollo in 911: Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, pp. 11–12; Labbe and Cossart (eds), *Sacrosancta Concilia*, xi, cols 483–94. For a discussion of the conversion see Whitelock, 'Conversion of the Eastern Danelaw'.

⁶³ As explored by Gransden, 'Legends and traditions'.

⁶⁴ Blunt, 'St Edmund memorial coinage'.

⁶⁵ Grierson and Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage* 1, p. 318.

⁶⁶ Blackburn, 'Ashdon (Essex) hoard'.

⁶⁷ This attitude to coinage in simple terms of bullion appears to be reflected in the use of 'Viking' coin weights, lead weights into which were set contemporary or old Anglo-Saxon coin issues: Williams, 'Anglo-Saxon and Viking coin weights', pp. 23–36.

the survival of an economy not only geared towards coin-use, but requiring fresh issues.⁶⁸ Its provision in East Anglia by Guthrum, under his baptismal name of Æthelstan, not only argues against an ethnic Scandinavian culture in the Danelaw at this time, but shows some measure of integration with the West Saxon economy. Indeed, the output of Elda and Simun was so good that they were once thought to be official moneyers of Alfred, producing coins with a silver content of 95% silver, a standard equal to Alfred's official issues.⁶⁹ This early understanding of Anglo-Saxon practices is crucial to an interpretation of the adoption of the Edmund memorial coinage.

An issue bearing the legend SCE EADMVND REX ('O St Edmund the king!'), based on Edmund's original coins, was produced from the mid-890s.⁷⁰ About 2,000 examples of the memorial issue are known, although more than 1,800 of these are from the Cuerdale hoard (Lancs.), deposited c.905. Over seventy moneyers' names are recorded, among which there is a high proportion of Continental Germanic names.⁷¹ The issue had a wide circulation in the Danelaw although single finds are concentrated in East Anglia and the East Midlands. Several East Anglian mints probably struck these coins, until the conquest of the East Midlands and East Anglia by Edward the Elder in 917/18.⁷²

The use and scale of the St Edmund issue demonstrates not only the popularity and economic need for the coinage but the significance of Edmund's cult. More important, it is clear that this cult had achieved prominence within only twenty-five years of the king's death. For the Viking leaders of the area to have adopted on their coinage the name of the king for whose death they were responsible, let alone hail his Christian power as a saint, demonstrates the force and rapidity with which his cult must have grown. It also attests to the adoption of an explicitly Christian outlook as the accretion of traditions surrounding Edmund's martyrdom 'undoubtedly took place within an English ecclesiastical setting which was bitterly hostile to the Danish point of view'.⁷³ While this does not speak directly of the physical survival of churches, it certainly hints at the continuity of pre-Viking religious personnel and communities, able to provide a spiritual focus for opposition and resistance to the Viking elite within East Anglia.

⁶⁸ Blackburn, 'Expansion and control', pp. 128–32. This need for fresh issues appears to have led to forgeries of West Saxon issues soon appearing. A recent example is a purse hoard of three pennies imitating (different) issues of Edward the Elder, recently found by metal-detection in Aylsham, Norfolk (Norfolk SMR no. 37441).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27. For East Anglian coinage of immediately pre-Viking conquest date see Smart, 'Moneyers of St Edmund'.

⁷⁰ Blunt, 'St Edmund memorial coinage', p. 253. Mark Blackburn has disagreed with Blunt's dating of the issue to c.892, suggesting instead a date centring on 895 'with latitude of several years either way'; Blackburn, 'Ashdon (Essex) hoard', p. 25.

⁷¹ This has led to the suggestion that, in the Vikings' determination to establish coinage, a substantial number of men were recruited from the Continent: Grierson and Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage 1*, p. 320. There is no suggestion why such men could not be recruited from elsewhere in England, especially as some moneyers appear to have been minting for Alfred too, and both Alfred and Guthrum's coinages suggest a level of co-operation. The suggestion is intriguing when set against the evidence for several Germanic names in Bishop Theodred's will, from about twenty years later (below, pp. 81–6). For the Cuerdale hoard see also Hawkins, 'An account of coins and treasure'.

⁷² Grierson and Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage 1*, pp. 320–1.

⁷³ Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings in the British Isles*, p. 210.

In fact, the Edmund coinage may have been one manifestation of the response by a ruling elite to political pressure, to stabilise their own position and to adopt Edmund in a process of social legitimation. For Alfred Smyth, this need for legitimation may be indicated by the growth of traditions surrounding the death of the Viking leader Ragnarr Loðbrók. These legendary accounts, he has argued, originated within the English Danelaw and developed into two distinct cycles, one locating Ragnarr in Northumbria, the other in East Anglia. Both portrayed Ragnarr's death at English hands, providing the stimulus for Viking revenge and conquest under his son Ívarr, and therefore giving a reason for the Viking's presence in those areas.⁷⁴ Regardless, it was certainly very convenient politically both for the Viking leaders and subsequently the West Saxon dynasty to present Edmund as dying celibate and therefore without natural successors.⁷⁵ The subsequent patronage of Edmund's community by West Saxon monarchs may have been encouraged by a desire to promote the memory of a virgin martyr to whom they could be seen as the rightful heirs. Certainly, the promotion of royal predecessors as saints has antecedents among many pre-Viking Age Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. For Susan Ridyard, the coinage may have been a response to the promoters of Edmund's cult whose 'hostility would be dangerous to the Danes'.⁷⁶ What she failed to provide was a context for this, instead lamenting 'a decade in which the history of East Anglia seems lost beyond recall'.⁷⁷

In fact, such a context suggests itself most plausibly in the death of Guthrum in 890. Jockeying for power in the wake of a king's death is a theme familiar throughout Anglo-Saxon history, and it is possible that the death of the man who had so nearly brought Wessex to its knees provided a stimulus for a power-struggle within East Anglia. As we have seen, numismatics suggest that between Edmund's death and Guthrum's return to East Anglia in 880, two figures, Oswald and Æthelred, ruled as clients for the Vikings. If not all the East Anglian royal family or aristocracy had been killed with Edmund, the promotion of a familial cult in the 890s may have been a natural response. Since the death of Guthrum appears to have preceded the first issue of the memorial coinage, it may be that the latter was, in part, consequent upon the former.⁷⁸ If the rump of an East

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 50–6. There are obvious difficulties in using the Loðbrók material to inform such historical analysis, not least as the stories actually appear in post-Conquest sources, for instance Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók*, written 1125×1132. The placing of Ragnarr Loðbrók in East Anglia occurs first in the English literature in Roger of Wendover's *Flores Historiarum*, written in the early thirteenth century. Interestingly, this describes Ragnarr as blown ashore in East Anglia, alone, during a wildfowling expedition: Giles (ed.), *Roger of Wendover's Flowers of History*, i, pp. 193–5. Unlike the 'Northumbrian cycle' which has King Ælla torturing and killing Ragnarr, Wendover's version portrays Edmund receiving the Viking with courtesy and allowing him to stay at court, before Loðbrók was killed by a jealous royal huntsman. The subsequent conquest of East Anglia and murder of Edmund could then be blamed on the cruelty of his son Ívarr, allowing the Danes also to venerate Edmund as their own. This version has the appearance of a later adaptation of Loðbrók material, quite possibly informed by those tales from the northern Danelaw. See also Loomis, 'Saint Edmund' and 'Growth of the Saint Edmund legend'.

⁷⁵ Hines, 'Anglo-Saxon archaeology of the Cambridge region', p. 135. Edmund's celibacy is first made explicit in the *Passio sancti Eadmundi* by Abbo of Fleury §19, for which see further below, pp. 81 and n. 91.

⁷⁶ Ridyard, *Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 217.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

⁷⁸ It is of potential interest to note the death of Guthrum and the appearance of the St Edmund memorial

The First Viking Age and its consequences

Anglian aristocracy was still in existence and had regrouped, it would not be surprising to see them promoting Edmund as a means of achieving a direct dialogue with, and powerbase among, their own people. Such a role for religion is well known in modern society, Steve Bruce for instance noting that

where there are two (or more) communities in conflict and they are of different religions . . . then the religious identity of each can acquire a new significance and call forth a new loyalty as religious identity becomes a way of asserting ethnic pride . . . when there is a people with a common religion dominated by an external force (of either a different religion or none at all), then religious institutions acquire an additional purpose as defenders of the culture and identity of the people.⁷⁹

The popular veneration of Edmund as a saint is unlikely to have originated initially with a conquering Danish king, although there were good reasons to adopt such devotion quickly, as we have seen. Instead, Edmund's popularity hints at a significant groundswell of support and devotion as a focus of opposition or defiance. In choosing to honour Edmund and promote his cult, the Danish leadership may have been attempting to draw the sting of any indigenous opposition and make a gesture of atonement for his death at their hands; by adopting Edmund, the new order was stealing the emperor's clothes.⁸⁰ The memorial coinage provides powerful circumstantial evidence for the survival and recovery of the Church, even if written evidence to corroborate that appears slightly later.

The first documentary witness to the foundation of a community guarding the shrine at Bury St Edmunds comes from a diploma of King Edmund I, dated 945, of uncertain authenticity.⁸¹ More certain evidence for the community guarding Edmund's corpse derives from the will of Theodred, bishop of London (942×951) who bequeathed land to the clerics.⁸² Discussion of Edmund's cult has usually focused upon the *Passio sancti Eadmundi* composed 985×987 by Abbo of Fleury, and of Archdeacon Hermann's subsequent *Liber de Miraculis sancti Eadmundi* (c.1095–1100).⁸³ The difficulty in using such sources as evidence for historical

coinage. If the notice of Guthrum's death in 890 in the *Annals of St Neots* was wrongly entered, this being only twelve, rather than the stated fourteen, years after his baptism, his obit could be rectified at 892 – Blunt's suggested start date for the memorial coinage. Unfortunately, the difficulty of accurately dating the inception of the memorial coinage and the reliance upon the *Annals of St Neot's* for Guthrum's obit make this perhaps more illusory than real. It does not, though, invalidate the subsequent adoption of the St Edmund coinage in a power struggle in the years following his death.

⁷⁹ Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World*, p. 96.

⁸⁰ The widespread adoption and veneration of Edmund's cult in Scandinavian homelands is reflected by the dissemination of traditions concerning his martyrdom. See above, n. 74, and Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings in the British Isles*, pp. 201–3.

⁸¹ The diploma (S 507), survives only in twelfth-century and later copies. Cyril Hart, *Early Charters of Eastern England*, pp. 54–8, suggested that it is not the forgery which it is usually suggested to be and while later erring away from this, was coming back to the view by 1981 (Hart, 'East Anglian Chronicle', p. 277). David Dumville has preferred not to commit himself on the issue, instead commenting in a footnote 'my colleagues Susan Kelly and Simon Keynes tell me that they see no diplomatic evidence which would lead them to question the authenticity of Edmund's diploma' (*English Caroline Script*, p. 38 n. 148).

⁸² Whitelock (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, no. 1.

⁸³ An edition of the *Passio* with facing translation is in Hervey (ed.), *Corolla sancti Eadmundi*, pp. 6–59, who also supplies an edition and translation of Hermann's *Liber* at pp. 90–5. For a more recent edition of the *Passio* see Winterbottom (ed.), *Three Lives of English Saints*, pp. 67–87. For considerations of the two accounts see Gransden, 'Abbo of Fleury's *Passio sancti Eadmundi*' and 'Legends and

enquiry is well known, the eyewitness reports underpinning accounts such as Abbo's being a hagiographic commonplace.⁸⁴ Antonia Gransden's analysis of the *Passio* has similarly demonstrated the plethora of *topoi* employed.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, in the absence of any other sources for Edmund, and in the requirement of some facts as points of departure for the original audience, some aspects can tentatively be corroborated.

According to Abbo (chapter 6), Edmund was captured and martyred at a royal site called *Hægelisdun*. Hermann informs us that his body was interred initially 'in a little village named Sutton, close to the scene of his martyrdom'⁸⁶ before his relics were translated to *Beodriceworth* during or before the reign of Æthelstan of Wessex (924–39). While the accuracy of these sources is unclear, the location of *Hægelisdun* seems to have been resolved by Stanley West's observation that a field-name of Hellesdon occurs on the 1840 tithe map of Bradfield St Clare, only about two-thirds of a mile from the place Sutton Hall.⁸⁷ The proximity of Sutton Hall to Bury St Edmunds (five and a half miles), provides a cogent reason for *Beodriceworth* being the final destination of Edmund's remains.⁸⁸ Equally satisfying, it seems to affirm the strength and accuracy of some traditions at Bury as late as Hermann's time.

The date of Edmund's translation to Bury is more problematic, but is unlikely to have been much later than the memorial coinage; to have attained such importance that a memorial coinage was struck, his cult must already have been well established. Cults required communities to act as guardians, and such communities rarely moved once established, except under exceptional circumstances (like that faced by St Cuthbert's community on being forced to Chester-le-Street and then to Durham). Such a move would have been most logical if it occurred earlier than, or at the same time as, the coinage first appeared. Indeed, the coinage may have been used to help promote the cult if freshly moved. Similarly, as Ridyard has pointed out, the translation can 'make sense only if [*Beodriceworth*] was already a political and religious centre of some importance'.⁸⁹ Again, reburial would make more sense, probably in a familial church, if done sooner rather than later after Edmund's death; this would be all the more so if the memorial coinage indeed represented a reaction to the popularity of the saint's cult. The evidence could therefore suggest the probable pre-Viking Age existence, and the survival or immediate revival, of a religious community at Bury, now hidden beneath the extensive remains of the medieval abbey.⁹⁰ Even a minimal view demonstrates

traditions'. For Hermann's authorship see Gransden, 'Composition and authorship of the *De Miraculis sancti Eadmundi*'.

⁸⁴ McDougall, 'Serious entertainments', p. 204. Some scholars have suggested that the eyewitness accounts may possibly be correct: Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings in the British Isles*, pp. 211–12; Whitelock, 'Fact and fiction', pp. 218–19.

⁸⁵ Gransden, 'Abbo of Fleury's *Passio Sancti Eadmundi*'.

⁸⁶ Hervey (ed.), *Corolla Sancti Eadmundi*, pp. 92–3.

⁸⁷ West, 'A new site'. See also Dymond, 'Coincidence or corroboration'.

⁸⁸ A ready parallel occurs with another East Anglian king, Anna, who was buried at the *villa regia* of Blythburgh, just across the river from the scene of his death at the Battle of Bulcamp in 654: *LE*, i, 7.

⁸⁹ Ridyard, *Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 220.

⁹⁰ A tradition first appearing in the twelfth-century *Liber Eliensis*, i, 1, suggests that this community may

the power of the Church, in that soon after the establishment of Danish overlordship in East Anglia, a community was established to guard Edmund's supposed remains. It is thus unsurprising that Abbo claims in chapter 16 of his *Passio* that by the time of Bishop Theodred⁹¹ the community had received 'a number of offerings and ornaments in gold and silver of great value'.⁹² The rapid inception of such a politically important cult helps to explain how Bury came to achieve its pre-eminent position among East Anglia's religious houses and indeed became one of the most powerful abbeys of medieval England. It also demonstrates the residual power and influence still wielded by the Church on the ground in early Danelaw East Anglia.

The will of Bishop Theodred

The first unequivocally genuine document for East Anglia after the First Viking Age is the will of Theodred, bishop of London.⁹³ Made 942×951, in it he bequeathed land in Surrey, Middlesex, Essex, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk (Fig. 16). The will is of interest not only as a genuine charter, but because several of the bequests are to named religious communities, all in Suffolk, namely Mendham, St Æthelberht's community at Hoxne, and St Edmund's church (i.e. Bury St Edmunds). While this does not prove the existence of these religious communities any earlier than 942, the dedication of Hoxne to Æthelberht, who was killed by Offa of Mercia in 794, again implies some measure of continuity with an East Anglian past.

Theodred's will has received surprisingly little detailed study, and repays closer consideration. It was made by a man who identified himself as 'bishop of the people of London', yet whose landholdings are principally in Suffolk. It is conceivable that Theodred was holding the East Anglian see officially, in plurality with that of London, and that London's superior status led him to describe himself as bishop of there only (perhaps in awareness of his plurality?).⁹⁴ Certainly, after he died, documentary evidence demonstrates there was a single

be identified with the foundation of Sigeberht c.640. Although it might make sense, this is weak evidence at best.

⁹¹ Antonia Gransden has suggested that the account of Theodred's viewing of Edmund's body is clumsy and may be an eleventh-century interpolation, in which case his involvement is irrelevant: 'Alleged incorruption of the body of St Edmund', p. 139. The difficulty with the passage is that evidence for interpolations derives from our knowledge of Ælfric's vernacular version of Abbo's *Passio*. This survives in an earlier manuscript than the first recension of the *Passio*, but omits several pieces of Abbo's work. Our earliest version of Abbo's *Passio* may, therefore, be padded with later insertions; or, Ælfric omitted several pieces; or, there was an unknown combination of both. This leaves us none the wiser as to which of these parts of Abbo are original although Ælfric is known especially as an abbreviator: Lapidge and Winterbottom (eds and transl.), *Wulfstan of Winchester*, p. cxlvii.

⁹² Hervey (ed.), *Corolla Sancti Eadmundi*, p. 47.

⁹³ Accession 909×926, death 951×953: O'Donovan, 'An interim revision of episcopal dates', parts I, p. 28 and II, p. 98. The will is Whitelock (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, no. 1.

⁹⁴ Whitelock noted that Theodred heads the episcopal signatures to charters from 940 probably because of his seniority: From c.935 lists began with the bishops of Winchester and London, whose sees were named unlike those of the following bishops: 'Some Anglo-Saxon bishops of London', p. 20 and n. 2. Knowles *et al.* noted several instances of pluralism at this time: *Heads of Religious Houses I*, p. 27.

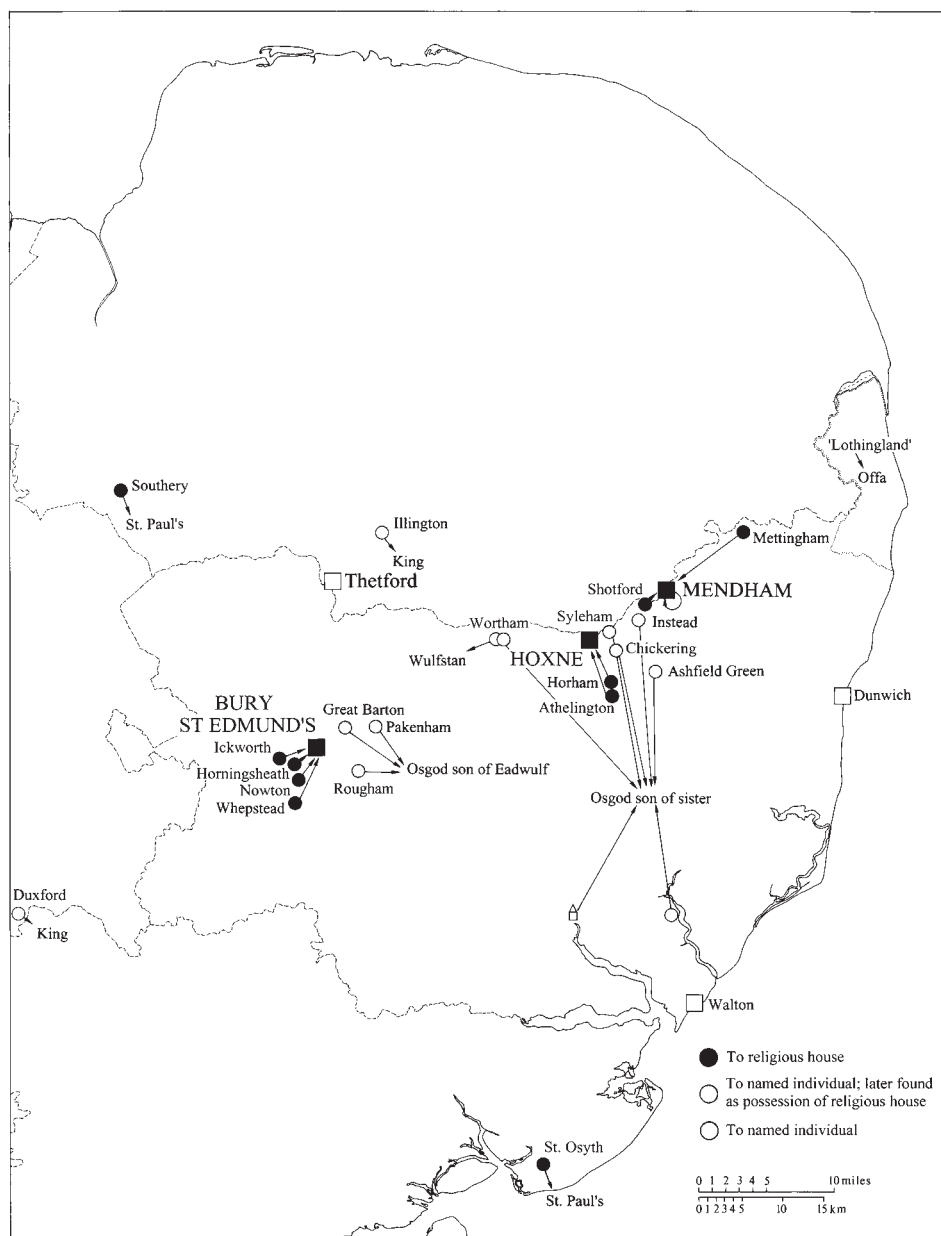


Fig. 16. Bequests of land made in the will of Theodred, bishop of London (942×951).

East Anglian diocese in the hands of its own bishop, beginning with Athulf, who attested as bishop of (North) Elmham in 955.⁹⁵

As bishop of London, Theodred naturally left many personal effects to St Paul's, including chasubles, a mass-book, and relics. Four estates were also

⁹⁵ Richter (ed.), *Canterbury Professions*, pp. 25–6.

directed to St Paul's, namely St Osyth's, Tillingham and Dunmow (Essex), and Southery (Norfolk).⁹⁶ As heriot, Theodred left both valuables and the estates of Duxford and Arrington in Cambridgeshire and Illington in Norfolk. Several other estates outside East Anglia are mentioned in connexion with Theodred's London episcopal demesne, those at Wimbledon and Sheen (Surrey), Fulham (Middlesex) and Dengie (Essex) having what he had added to them to be used for the benefit of his soul and for his (London) minster.⁹⁷

Of more interest, and providing a counterpoint to the above, is the fact that the remaining estates are all located in Suffolk. Theodred's will mentions some thirty-one estates,⁹⁸ of which only eleven are outside Suffolk. Moreover, the twenty Suffolk estates (not including Theodred's episcopal demesne at Hoxne) are concentrated into close groupings with only two outliers, Mettingham⁹⁹ and Waldringfield; all except Waldringfield are grouped in a swathe running south-west to north-east closely following the Norfolk-Suffolk border. The location of these Suffolk estates is of great interest for their proximity to the religious establishments at Hoxne, Mendham and Bury St Edmunds. While the majority of estates were left to individuals in the will, apparently to members of Theodred's family, their close distribution can scarcely be a matter of coincidence.

In fact, the whole will appears to reflect complex landholding arrangements. Hart has pointed out various elements, such as the possibility that Theodred 'may have given the tenancy of The Naze to his relative Eadulf, an example of episcopal nepotism on the St Paul's estates similar to that provided by Bishop Oswald at Worcester a decade later'.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, the St Paul's estates were divided between the bishop and the chapter in Domesday Book, but their original division is unclear. For Hart, Theodred's will clearly shows land being directed to the community, in the case of St Osyth's, 'as an estate to provide sustenance for the community',¹⁰¹ at Southery 'to the community' and at Tillingham and Dunmow 'for the community'. For Hart, these estates are best considered as already being the property of canons; thus his will in fact acknowledges their existing rights rather than being a *de novo* grant, and Theodred had named *all* the estates (Hart's emphasis) then held by St Paul's either as episcopal or as community property.¹⁰²

If correct, this view raises interesting questions and possibilities about the remaining Suffolk estates named in the will. Could it be, for example, that as the bishop of the East Angles Theodred was similarly confirming lands already belonging to the communities mentioned? Alternatively, as Whitelock speculated, after being made bishop in East Anglia he may have 'become well

⁹⁶ This last estate was granted to Theodred in 942 by King Edmund, providing one of the dating parameters to his will: Hart, 'Eastern Danelaw', p. 33.

⁹⁷ Whitelock (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, no. 1.

⁹⁸ This includes Worham as two estates. Whitelock listed these as *Wortinham* (i.e., not positively identified) and *Worham* (*ibid.*, pp. 553–4). However, Cyril Hart has confidently seen them as two estates in the same place, citing Eilert Ekwall who noted that the divergent spellings of *Wrtinham* and *Wrtham* (*worþ* and *worþig(n)*) often interchange for the same name in early sources: Hart, *Early Charters of Eastern England*, p. 54; Ekwall, *Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, pp. 535–6.

⁹⁹ At only seven and a half miles from Mendham, this is a most propinquitous outlier.

¹⁰⁰ Hart, 'St Paul's estates in Essex', p. 210 n. 19.

¹⁰¹ Whitelock (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, no. 1, pp. 1–2.

¹⁰² Hart, 'St Paul's estates in Essex', p. 213.

established there' and so built up large holdings in Suffolk before succeeding to London.¹⁰³ If we see Theodred as a native of Suffolk,¹⁰⁴ his landholdings become slightly easier to account for, but if he was a newcomer, this becomes harder. Furthermore, even as a native, the distribution of lands matches the location of three known communities so closely that they can hardly be coincidental with his position as diocesan in the area. Three possibilities suggest themselves.

First, Theodred was indeed the private owner of all the estates mentioned, and he selected several of those closest to each of the communities as bequests, presumably to be most beneficial in helping them to build up surrounding holdings. The bequest of his estate 'at Lothingland to Offa my sister's son and his brother'¹⁰⁵ certainly suggests a familial holding in presuming the audience to know its precise location: Lothingland is the name of a Suffolk hundred rather than a specific place. Second, as with Hart's suggestion about St Paul's, the mention of several estates may have been confirmations of land already held by the communities. The remainder formed personally held estates. Third, from his position as East Anglian bishop, Theodred had been able to acquire several of the estates belonging to the various religious communities mentioned.

The acquisition of land is a highly complex topic in this period and one made all the more puzzling by the tantalisingly few references which survive. It could be that Theodred had abused his position and managed to alienate Church property,¹⁰⁶ a temptation certainly common enough in the (better documented) post-Conquest period.¹⁰⁷ Alternatively, Theodred's family might, during the Viking

¹⁰³ Whitelock, 'Some Anglo-Saxon bishops of London', p. 20.

¹⁰⁴ Theodred, probably a German name, could have been a Continental reinforcement to the English Church in its recovery towards the end of the First Viking Age. He left ecclesiastical items to others with German names (Gundwine, Odgar, Theodred and Gosebriht), while mentioning no clergyman with an English name. Cyril Hart, on no obvious grounds, has speculated that Theodred 'may have descended at least partly from Danish stock. His name suggests a baptismal name, given . . . after a late conversion': 'Eastern Danelaw', p. 33. If not English, Theodred's German origin seems preferable as he mentions in his will a mass book left to him by the German-named Gosebriht and bequeathing a yellow chasuble which he bought in Pavia. He had certainly experienced the Continent and, as a man with contacts with English monastic reformers, had possibly witnessed Continental monastic reform first hand: Whitelock, 'Some Anglo-Saxon bishops of London', p. 20.

¹⁰⁵ Whitelock (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, no. 1, pp. 4–5.

¹⁰⁶ This might contrast with the epithet that Abbo gave Theodred in his *Passio sancti Eadmundi*, chapter 16, calling him 'of blessed memory, the pious bishop of the province, whose good deserts challenged for him the designation of "the Good"' (*sed et beatæ memoriæ Theodredus, ejusdem provinciæ religiosus episcopus, qui propter meritum prærogatirum bonus appellabatur*): Hervey (ed.), *Corolla Sancti Eadmundi*, pp. 46–7. This seems to be the correct source for this epithet rather than, as Whitelock quoted, William of Malmesbury's *de Gestis Pontificum Anglorum* (c.1125), notwithstanding the possibility that Theodred's appearance in the *Passio* could be a post-Conquest addition: Whitelock, 'Some Anglo-Saxon bishops of London', p. 20.

¹⁰⁷ For instance, the monks of Thorney feared that King William's abbatial appointee, Fulchard of Saint-Bertin, would alienate their Conington estate to his relatives; and at Peterborough, Thorold, appointed in 1069, was guilty of large-scale alienations. As Sandra Raban has noted, 'even the most upright of abbots were inclined to favour friends and relatives. A society built on kinship and clientage expected it': *Estates of Thorney and Crowland*, p. 23. A similar possible alienation is suggested by the will of Thurketel of Palgrave who granted an estate there to Bury St Edmunds some time before 1038. The abbey appears to have received four *cassati* (or hides) here from a certain Wulfstan in 962 and held four carucates in 1066: Whitelock (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, p. 179. The estate granted by Thurketel may, therefore, have been alienated at some previous point, before being returned to Bury.

incursions, have secured lands in the area belonging to the communities and his will reflected the return of these to their former owners.¹⁰⁸

Finally, a less controversial explanation, but one presupposing an equally complex landholding situation, may be suggested. It is clear that practices in the ownership, acquisition and exchange of land title were labyrinthine by the mid-tenth century. It is conceivable that several of the estates need not have been owned by Theodred but leased by him. The variety of leases used in Late Anglo-Saxon society has been explored by Sandra Raban and J. A. Raftis.¹⁰⁹ While some varieties are eleventh-century developments in the holdings of Benedictine houses, leased or 'loan' land can be seen at least as early as the time of Bishop Oswald (961–92), a tenure by which land was leased, usually for three lives, in return for which the lessees provided service.¹¹⁰ It is perhaps of more than passing interest that Theodred appears to have been one of the earliest monastic reformers, or at least to have been associated with several of the reform's leading lights.¹¹¹ He might have been familiar with the landholding practices of these reform figures, if indeed such methods were not a reflection of wider, existing custom in Anglo-Saxon society. For a religious community, the local bishop might have been considered a preferable tenant to ensure the correct reversion of land to the community at the end of the term of such a lease. Such terms would also account for Theodred's ability to bequeath land to his kinsmen and add extra reason for Theodred's will to have been preserved in Bury St Edmunds' house records.¹¹² Certainly, other East Anglian bishops appear to have taken on Bury's land; Bishop Æthelmær's will reads more like a bequest to Bury, but an agreement elsewhere (Cambridge University Library MS Ff.2.33, fol. 49), dating to 1043/1044, shows that in fact two of the estates were received *from* Bury and were to be returned to the abbey on his death.¹¹³ In the event, his successor, Bishop William, managed to retain them, an ample testament to the problems which could be encountered and the mobility of land in the Late Anglo-Saxon period.

It is clear from Domesday Book that by 1066, holdings given by Theodred to Osgod were in Bury's possession where, crucially, all three estates are listed sequentially with an estate at Fornham.¹¹⁴ Moreover, of the lands surrounding Theodred's episcopal footstool at Hoxne, the two estates at Chickering and Syleham, bequeathed to Osgod, son of his (unnamed) sister, were, again, by 1066

¹⁰⁸ It could be argued that this is impossible for Bury St Edmunds, if the community was only founded in the wake of that king's martyrdom. However, this ignores the likelihood expressed above that his body was specifically taken to a pre-existing *monasterium* at Beodriceworth.

¹⁰⁹ Raban, *Estates of Thorney and Crowland*; Raftis, *Estates of Ramsey Abbey*.

¹¹⁰ Burton, *Monastic and Religious Orders*, p. 11.

¹¹¹ In his will, Theodred left five mancuses of gold to Oda, archbishop of Canterbury, an early exponent of monastic reform; five pounds to Glastonbury, Dunstan's reformed house (which is the only house outside his own diocese to receive such a request), and fifty mancuses of gold to Queen Eadgifu, another supporter of monastic reform: Whitelock, 'Some Anglo-Saxon bishops of London', p. 20.

¹¹² The cartulary manuscript in which the will is preserved (Sacrist's Register, Cambridge University Library, MS Ff.2.33, fol. 48) was written about the beginning of the fourteenth century, but copied from earlier manuscripts.

¹¹³ Whitelock (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, no. 35 and p. 205.

¹¹⁴ LDB, fols 361b–362a.

held by the bishop, now seated at Thetford.¹¹⁵ In the case of Syleham, Domesday records that Ælmar (probably for Æthelmær) and Erfast (for Herfast), bishops 1047–70 and 1070–85 respectively, ‘held this’, bringing its episcopal ownership potentially as early as 1047.¹¹⁶ If the Domesday ownership of these lands is indeed indicative of a leasing arrangement, a further proposition may be made. It is a feature of the later reformed Benedictine houses that, in their initial endowment, all estates were geared towards providing for the welfare of the abbey, that is, in food-renders and dues in kind.¹¹⁷ After this basic provision had been met, the houses were more willing to lease land for financial returns or later, with *precaria remuneratoria* leases, to acquire more land.¹¹⁸ If this long-term leasing is to be seen at Bury, and possibly also at Hoxne, it suggests that both might have been in the position to lease out land with their own immediate needs already provided for.¹¹⁹ While it would be unwise to read too much into the limited evidence presented, it is clear that communal religious life in the Danelaw was strong enough by 951 at least, for institutions to be in receipt of generous endowments.

Continuity at other sites

The picture presented by Theodred’s will appears to be confirmed by evidence in *Libellus Æthelwoldi* (translated into Latin 1109×1131), §42.¹²⁰ At Horningsea, a ‘royal’ *monasterium* is described as having a number of clerics under a priest Cenwold at the time of the Danish settlement. Archaeological evidence suggests that Horningsea formed an important estate centre in the Middle Anglo-Saxon period. Until divided by Ely Abbey in 1412, Horningsea comprised a single parish with Fen Ditton, focussed upon a peninsula of chalk extending into peat fen to the north and east, and bounded by the River Cam to the west. Indeed, Horningsea appears to derive its name from this topography, meaning ‘the island, or dry ground in marsh . . . by the horn-shaped hill’.¹²¹ The significance of this land unit is indicated by a massive linear earthwork, known erroneously as the Fleam Dyke, cutting the peninsula off from the land to the south.¹²² The dyke is a

¹¹⁵ *LDB*, fol. 379b.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*; Rigold, ‘Bishops of the re-established see at Elmham’, p. 9.

¹¹⁷ Raftis, *Estates of Ramsey Abbey*, p. 10.

¹¹⁸ By this method of tenure, a lessee held land from the abbey for one life rent free, but on the death of the lessee, the land returned with another, previously designated, area of land from the lessee’s own holdings: *ibid.*, p. 18.

¹¹⁹ A caveat is that a feature of the reformed Benedictine houses of the tenth century was their collectivisation, whereby land was no longer held as a prebend but in common. This was one reason why the canons at Winchester needed to be forcibly expelled in 964. However, this does *not* deny the possibility that some land was already held in common by unreformed communities, and indeed Theodred, like other Anglo-Saxon testators, left estates to a community that was presumably left to arrange the land’s management and use as it saw fit. Other examples include the bequests of land to the community at Stoke by Ælfgar (will 946×951) and Ælflæd (will c.1002): Whitelock (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, nos 2 and 15.

¹²⁰ And subsequently copied 1169×1174 into *Liber Eliensis*: ii, 32.

¹²¹ Mills, *Dictionary of English Place-Names*, p. 179.

¹²² The true Fleam Dyke, part of a system of Early Medieval dykes in this area, lies further to the south-east.

The First Viking Age and its consequences

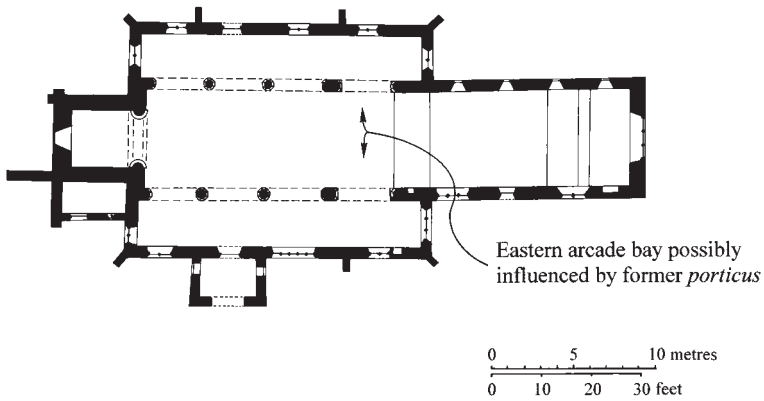


Fig. 17. Groundplan of Horningsea church, Cambs.

major structure, almost two miles (three kilometres) long, and in places survives up to forty feet (twelve metres) wide. Its date is uncertain but possibly fifth-century, Migration period Anglo-Saxon weapons having been discovered apparently in the dyke's upper fill during roadworks.¹²³ The ditch had been oriented to extend to Quy Bridge, thus controlling the river crossing there, and was clearly intended to look 'out' to the south, defending the peninsula. The positioning of Fen Ditton church at one end of the ditch is unlikely to have been accidental, as we shall see later in considering Horning in Norfolk, and may perhaps have provided an entrance-type church or chapel to the peninsula area.¹²⁴ While the earthwork is likely to have been of some antiquity by the time the *monasterium* was established, it suggests an importance to this land unit, consonant with its description as royal in the *Libellus*, and makes it perfectly credible that the Ely source is correct in ascribing a pre-Viking foundation there. Possible support for the former existence of a high-status church at Horningsea comes from the ground-plan of the present parish church. Surveying by the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments (RCHME) showed that the easternmost arcades to the nave north and south aisles have wider spans than the remaining arches to their west, and have a continuous wall before reaching the east end wall (Fig. 17). These suggest a pre-Conquest church design using north and south *porticus*, which 'probably dictated the plan of the existing building'.¹²⁵ While the Commission interpreted such features as Middle Anglo-Saxon, the use of *porticus* has been argued to continue much later, Breamore in Hampshire, for instance, perhaps dating from 'any time in the fifty years after 970'.¹²⁶ The date is

¹²³ For the weapons see Lethbridge, 'Riddle of the dykes', pp. 1–5. Radiocarbon determinations have shown that the main Fleam Dyke was first constructed at a date centring on the fifth century, with ensuing phases of sixth-century date and later. On the basis of this, the Horningsea stretch of the Fleam Dyke and three other Cambridgeshire dykes (Bran Ditch, Brent Ditch and Devil's Dyke) are argued to be of a similar date: Malim *et al.*, 'New evidence on the Cambridgeshire dykes', especially at pp. 95–8 and 100–117.

¹²⁴ It is of passing interest to note the discovery of a bronze stylus in Fen Ditton parish through metal-detection: Cambridgeshire SMR number 05531A. For Horning see Chapter 4, pp. 138–42.

¹²⁵ RCHME, *County of Cambridgeshire II*, p. xxxv.

¹²⁶ Fernie, *Architecture of the Anglo-Saxons*, p. 114.

therefore far from certain, but the fossilising of elements such as *porticus* in a medieval fabric is rare and suggests a church of above average importance.¹²⁷

Horningsea is of interest not simply as a rare example of a documented community in the eastern region, but as one explicitly stated to have survived ‘the madness of the pagans ravaging East Anglia’.¹²⁸ *Libellus Æthelwoldi* describes the priest Cenwold exercising sacerdotal office during the period of Viking activity, and being succeeded on his death by another priest, Herewulf. ‘Later those people who had joined together from paganism to the grace of baptism gave this minster five hides at Horningsea and two at Eye.’¹²⁹ This passage is of importance on three counts. First, it demonstrates the survival of traditions from the First Viking Age, suggesting the transferral of such recollections to a written form by the later tenth century.¹³⁰ Second, this record was created as a result of the ensuing dispute over the title to Horningsea’s lands; it therefore negated the need for *topoi* describing the desolation wrought by the Vikings which chronicle writers typically tended to employ. Third, the institution and patronage of Horningsea, with the attendant complexity in landholding arrangements, show the familial nature and ownership attached to *monasteria*. The only reason the community appears in the *Libellus* was that the land was regarded as hereditary property by Herewulf, a retainer of King Æthelstan (924–39). When Bishop Æthelwold bought it from King Edgar (957–975) as an endowment for Ely, a struggle for control of the land was set in motion, involving at least two more priests, Æthelstan and Leofric. This land dispute may have been one of many attempts to take advantage of the backlash against the monastic reform and the more general instability after Edgar’s death in 975, but the continuity of Horningsea is nonetheless assumed. Of more interest is the point that a *monasterium*, supposedly of royal rank, was being contested by figures apparently unassociated with royal circles. While it may be a conceit of the *Libellus* to talk of Horningsea’s royal status, that three priests are mentioned in the ownership struggle underlines the intimate bond between the institution and the clerics’ own familial landholding interests. Such close attachments help provide a mechanism for understanding how wider structural problems with the Anglo-Saxon Church during the First Viking Age were probably mitigated on the ground by local continuity.

Even Ely seems to have weathered the Viking storm. Again, the *Libellus* demonstrates that a community of clerics inhabited the *monasterium* here before its refoundation as a Benedictine monastery by Æthelwold. In one case a hide of land at Cambridge was donated ‘long before Bishop Æthelwold collected the monks at Ely’; in another, a marsh and land at Stonea were held by lease from the community ‘for nearly fifteen years before Bishop Æthelwold took possession of Ely’ (i.e. c.955).¹³¹ Such a community, virtually all traces of which were lost

¹²⁷ The church also houses a later tenth- or early eleventh-century stone coffin lid that indicates above average status burial.

¹²⁸ *Libellus* §42: Keynes and Kennedy (eds and transl.), *Book of Bishop Æthelwold*, forthcoming.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, §42 (copied as *LE*, ii, 32).

¹³⁰ For a wider discussion of the origins of this process, see Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, especially at pp. 260–66 and 294–9.

¹³¹ *Libellus* §27 and §34, incorporated at *LE*, ii, 18 and 24: Keynes and Kennedy (eds and transl.), *Book of Bishop Æthelwold*, forthcoming.

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following the refoundation in c.970, would have allowed the maintenance of Æthelthryth's cult and shrine and, of course, provided a reason for the Benedictine reform of the house.

Finally, a scrappy hint of continuity is suggested by the *Annals of St Neots* where, s.a. 890, a notice is preserved of the burial of Guthrum at the royal vill of Hadleigh.¹³² Guthrum's burial at a place described as a *villa regia* is of interest. The Hadleigh in question would appear to be that in Suffolk (rather than Essex) where a minster certainly existed in the eleventh century.¹³³ This could have been a foundation made by Guthrum, or subsequent to his death, but its coincidence with a *villa regia* strongly suggests that this was another church to have re-emerged, despite the vicissitudes of the Danish invasions.

The role of relics

The fragmentary nature of the sources for East Anglia nevertheless speaks of a local continuity, and this is reinforced by the continued importance of relics. The culting of saints was an integral feature of the early Anglo-Saxon Church, corporeal remains being valued both intrinsically and as a magnet for benefactions. While the most important cult in East Anglia surrounded Edmund, the translation of other saints suggests the survival of communities curating their relics. The determination shown in the accumulation and establishment of landholdings for reformed houses also extended to relics. With the patronage of King Edgar (himself an enthusiastic collector of relics), it is questionable whether many smaller *monasteria*, perhaps like *Icanho*, were able to resist the requests of places like Ely.

The most obvious instance of this is the theft in 974 of the remains of Wihtburh, moved from *Derham* to Ely under Abbot Byrhtnoth. Although the subject of debate by antiquarians, there seems little doubt that East rather than West Dereham in Norfolk is meant. East Dereham has a large church with a cruciform groundplan, possibly indicative of its former status, and a chapel dedicated to Wihtburh to the east of the present church. There is also a spring immediately to the west of the church, which according to legend rose on the spot of Wihtburh's grave following the translation of her relic (Plate 5). A now-lost second spring, further west and called Wihtburh's well, was noted in the eighteenth century by the Thetford antiquary Thomas Martin.¹³⁴ Not only was East Dereham probably an archaic estate centre, with eleven adjoining parishes; it only became known as 'East' Dereham c.1428. By contrast, the closer definition of 'West' Dereham is first found in 1203, suggesting that most readers of *Liber Eliensis* would understand plain *Derham* to mean the eastern location.¹³⁵

¹³² The entry suggests Guthrum died fourteen years after his baptism, but because his baptism was in 878 following his defeat by Alfred at Edington, he must have died only 12 years later for the annal date, found also in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, to be correct: Dumville and Lapidge (eds), *Annals of St Neots*, p. 95.

¹³³ The manor owned by Christ Church Canterbury in 1086 included a church with an exceptional one carucate of free land: *LDB*, fol. 372b.

¹³⁴ NRO, Rye MS 17.

¹³⁵ Rose, 'St Withburga and her wells', p. 14. The evidence for West Dereham is effectively confined to



Plate 5. St Wihtburh's well to the west of East Dereham church, Norfolk.

The tale of the translation, related in *Liber Eliensis* from an earlier *Life* of Wihtburh, is unflattering towards Ely.¹³⁶ The house attempted to relate the story as an 'appropriate holy sacrilege'¹³⁷ justified by the greater honour to be gained by the saint if reunited with the remains of her sister Æthelthryth. The removal of Wihtburh's remains by night, and the subsequent harrying by the townspeople of the boat taking the relics from Brandon, are, in themselves, a hagiographic commonplace,¹³⁸ but such *topoi* are irrelevant to the underlying point; Wihtburh had died before the First Viking Age and her body had apparently survived in its resting-place through Viking invasions, as presumably had a community guarding the shrine.¹³⁹ A mechanism for the translation to have occurred is further

the archaeological evidence for substantial Middle Anglo-Saxon occupation, including imported Tating ware pottery: Andrews, 'Middle Saxon Norfolk', p. 16. The foundation of a Premonstratensian abbey in 1188 could conceivably indicate some form or tradition of religious continuity with West Dereham, but the dedication has no mention of Wihtburh. A similar absence of interest in Wihtburh is evident in the two parish churches of St Andrew and St Peter: Binns, *Dedications of Monastic Houses*, p. 169; Pevsner and Wilson, *Buildings of England: North-West and South Norfolk*, pp. 763–4. Despite this, some have seen West Dereham as the location of the *monasterium*: Bond *et al.*, *The North Folk*, p. 33. See also Davison, 'Dereham controversy'.

¹³⁶ For evidence of this lost earlier *Life* see Blake (ed.), *Liber Eliensis*, p. xxxvii.

¹³⁷ *idoneus ad sanctum sacrilegium*: LE, ii, 53.

¹³⁸ Geary, *Furta Sacra*, pp. 17 and 118–24 for the formation of the literary tradition. The phenomenon of theft is so common in hagiographical literature that Geary's handlist of relic thefts, published as Appendix B, is 'almost certainly incomplete': pp. 149–56 at p. 149.

¹³⁹ Wihtburh's death in 743 is calculated from the statement in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* 'F', of Christ Church Canterbury, that 'in the same year the body of Wihtburh was found quite sound and free from corruption at Dereham, fifty-five years after she departed this life': Garmonsway (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, p. 56. The alternative, and less likely, date of 756 derived from *Vita Withburge* which states that her body was translated (again) at Ely, 350 years after her death. The convenient rounding of this number makes the *Chronicle* record more likely to be accurate.

suggested by Ely's sole possession of East Dereham as a substantial manor of five carucates by 1066, along with the soke of the hundred and a half of Mitford as an appurtenance. It is unclear when East Dereham came into Ely's possession. *Liber Eliensis* claims the soke of Mitford had been granted by King Edgar, along with those of the Isle of Ely and the five and a half hundreds of Wicklaw in Suffolk, but the manor does not appear in *Libellus Æthelwoldi*. However, it had been granted by 1029×1035. Then, Abbot Leofsige, with Cnut's permission, reorganised the farming of Ely's demesne manors.¹⁴⁰ It would seem remarkable for Ely to plunder a valuable relic of so much interest to them from a *monasterium* which they happened to be in possession of no more than sixty years later, if they did not already have an interest in East Dereham. The translation most probably amounted to a 'rationalisation' by the monastery in 974 of one of their possessions.¹⁴¹ The response of the East Dereham people might then be an accurate reflection of their feeling about losing their relic, or simply a *topos* to show the value of, and devotion attached to, Wihthurb.

The translation of other relics in the tenth century suggests a similar situation elsewhere. It is possible that many communities had not survived Viking raids, leading to the subsequent translation of so many relics. It would indicate that churches lay abandoned, without clergy, yet leaving some of their greatest assets, saintly remains. This seems highly unlikely. To believe the memory of these relics remained – as did the corporeal remains themselves – for others to remove is improbable. Infinitely more likely is that local communities were deprived of their relics by the new, powerful, figures of the monastic reform, under whose influence houses such as Ely most certainly acted.

We may cite other examples. Botolph's relics came from a building at *Icanho*, supposedly ruined, although this need be no more than a justification of the translation. If *Icanho* can be identified with Iken in Suffolk, as seems likely,¹⁴² we may again see the hand of Ely and more specifically of Bishop Æthelwold. It was he who translated the relics, which were divided into three, two parts going to his foundations at Ely and Thorney, the third part going to the refounded royal monastery at Westminster. Crucially, the translation probably occurred under Æthelwold shortly after he had been granted the manor of Sudbourne by King Edgar, of which Iken seems to have formed a part.¹⁴³

Blythburgh in Suffolk suggests itself as another clerical community to have weathered the storm. At Domesday, Blythburgh was an extensive royal demesne, gave its name to the surrounding hundred, and had a church to which other churches without land belonged. The church was also richly endowed with two carucates of land (240 acres).¹⁴⁴ There is no direct evidence for a pre-Viking

¹⁴⁰ *LE*, ii, 84; Miller, *Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*, pp. 37–8. The dating bracket is provided by Leofric's appointment as abbot in 1029 (Knowles *et al.*, *Heads of Religious Houses I*, pp. 44–5) and Cnut's death in 1035.

¹⁴¹ This rationalisation is also the most likely reason why East Dereham church had only a modestly above average thirty acres of land attached by the time it was recorded in the *Inquisitio Eliensis*, compiled c.1086.

¹⁴² See Chapter 2, p. 25 and n. 35.

¹⁴³ *Libellus* §49: Keynes and Kennedy (eds and transl.), *Book of Bishop Æthelwold*, forthcoming. The account was copied into *LE*, ii, 37.

¹⁴⁴ *LDB*, fol. 282a; Warner, *Origins of Suffolk*, pp. 120–1.

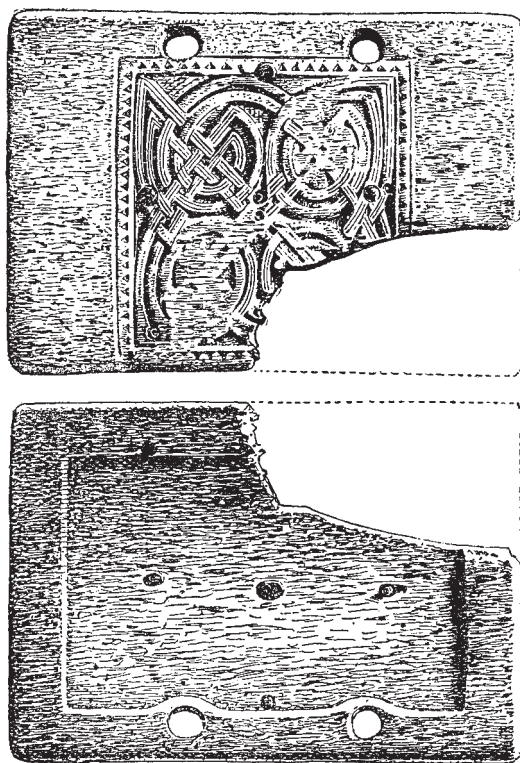


Fig. 18. Eighth-century carved whalebone plaque found near Blythburgh church in 1906. Length 94mm, width 63mm. (After Waller, 'Notes on part of a "tabella" '.)

religious community existing here but it is strongly implied by the veneration of King Anna of East Anglia's remains here in the twelfth century.¹⁴⁵ Anna had been killed opposite the vill, at the Battle of Bulcamp, by Penda of Mercia in 654. That his body should have remained here into the twelfth century clearly suggests the maintenance of a priestly community based in the royal vill. The presence of an earlier royal *monasterium* at Blythburgh is supported by the discovery near the church of a whalebone plaque bearing eighth-century interlace and three styli (Fig. 18).¹⁴⁶ In addition to Anna's remains, Blythburgh also appears to have owned the relics of his son, Jurminus, which had apparently been translated to Bury St Edmunds at some point before the end of the eleventh century.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ *LE*, i, 7.

¹⁴⁶ Waller, 'Notes on part of a "tabella" '. A fourth stylus from Blythburgh has recently been found by a metal-detectorist (October 2002). It is copper-alloy, of plain form, with incised bands all along the shaft. Unfortunately, the finder has refused to locate the object accurately. I am grateful to my colleague Steven Ashley for bringing this find to my attention.

¹⁴⁷ His translation is mentioned in a Bury document of the mid-twelfth century, now Oxford, Bodley MS 297, a copy of the *Chronicle* of John of Worcester, into which much local material had been inserted. The translation is recorded as occurring s.a. 1095, along with that of Edmund and Bury's share of Botolph's relics: Arnold (ed.), *Memorials of St Edmunds Abbey*, i, pp. 351–2. William of Malmesbury in his *Gesta Pontificum* written c.1125 similarly mentions Jurminus and Botolph being buried at Bury (§74): Hamilton (ed.), *De Gestis Pontificum*, p. 156; Preest (transl.), *Deeds of the Bishops of England*,

Finally, another translation to Ely suggests that a community once existed at March. Here, the relics of an obscure virgin, Wendreda, were taken by Abbot Ælfsige until lost when the Ely monks carried them into battle at *Assandun* in 1016.¹⁴⁸ Although nothing is known of Wendreda, her move to Ely is explicable by the abbey's acquisition of land at March, given by Leofflæd, daughter of Ealdorman Byrhtnoth, and her husband Oswi in their lifetimes.¹⁴⁹ March itself has confusing evidence for being a former *monasterium* because it was a chapelry of Doddington until the nineteenth century, and it is Doddington that Christopher Taylor has suggested was the site of an early church, with March, Benwick and Wimblington all attached as chapelries.¹⁵⁰ Doddington was originally a large island of clay and loam set in surrounding fen, four miles long and up to about two miles wide. It would be perfectly reasonable to suggest such a land unit would have been serviced by its own priestly community; the attachment of March to Doddington might, perhaps, relate to a reorganisation of ecclesiastical arrangements on the island by Ely Abbey. Ely had certainly owned some land in Doddington because it had been exchanged for land in Cambridge.¹⁵¹ Of course, our ignorance of Wendreda makes it impossible to know whether she had lived before or after the Viking incursions, but the former seems likely.

It seems implausible that translations such as these were from churches abandoned after their destruction by Vikings. Instead, they suggest that there had been a maintenance in the tradition of caring for relics locally. This veneration of saints who were important to the early Christian history of the kingdom has one other possible manifestation, in the survival of church dedications.

Church dedications

The analysis of church dedications is replete with problems. In theory, it might be possible to show that commemoration of saints important to the pre-Viking Church in East Anglia indicates the maintenance of a church on a site into the Late Anglo-Saxon period. In practice, the crucial prerequisite – early evidence for a particular dedication – is far harder to come by for an area such as East Anglia, with its attenuated documentary record. Indeed, we do not even know the

p. 102. This translation is likely to have been his second at Bury, since the 1095 translations occurred as part of the completion of Abbot Baldwin's great new abbey church at Bury, finished in 1094: Gransden, 'Question of the Consecration'. Bury's acquisition of Jurminius' relics only seems curious, not least because Anna had, like Edmund, been killed defending his East Anglian kingdom against pagans, in this case against Penda's Mercians. The two might be expected to have made perfect saintly companions.

¹⁴⁸ Ælfsige was abbot 996×999 – 1012×1016, or possibly 1019: Knowles *et al.*, *Heads of Religious Houses I*, pp. 44 and 247. According to *Liber Eliensis* (ii, 79), Wendreda's relics were removed by Cnut, the victor, to Canterbury. For *Assandun* see Chapter 4, pp. 116–18.

¹⁴⁹ Leofflæd's will is undated; that of Oswi is no later than 995×1001, during the episcopacy of Bishop Æthelstan of East Anglia who witnessed the will. His obit was commemorated at Ely as 5 May, but the identification of this Oswi as the same man who fell at the Battle of Ringmere in 1010 is less certain: Dickens, 'Day of Byrhtnoth's death', pp. 16–17.

¹⁵⁰ Taylor, *Cambridge Landscape*, pp. 116–17. See also Bennett, 'Ecclesiastical topography of Fenland', especially at pp. 62–71.

¹⁵¹ *Libellus*, §32: Keynes and Kennedy (eds and transl.), *Book of Bishop Æthelwold*, forthcoming.

dedication of those documented early *monasteria* like *Cnobheresburg*. The uncommonly large number of parish churches in Norfolk and Suffolk, apparently related to competitive church building by an emerging thegnly class from the tenth century onwards, only exacerbates the problem.¹⁵² Even for those churches where an early dedication is known, the political importance attached to relics and the veneration of saints meant that devotion to a particular figure could change. This proactive use of dedications is witnessed in the case of Hoxne, Suffolk. The will of Bishop Theodred (942×951) mentions the ‘community of St Æthelberht’s church’ but this dedication can be no earlier than 794 when this East Anglian king was murdered by Offa at Sutton Walls in Hereford.¹⁵³ In 1101 the then diocesan, Herbert de Losinga, granted to his cathedral priory at Norwich ‘the church of Hoxne with the chapel of saint Edmund of the same town where the same martyr was killed’.¹⁵⁴ The dedication of the church had by then become SS Peter and Paul, which it remains today. It is possible that the church mentioned by Theodred was neither of the two known later churches, but the continued interests of the local diocesan at Hoxne make this seem unlikely.¹⁵⁵ More probably, either the chapel to Æthelberht had been rededicated to Edmund or the parish church to Peter and Paul; an eminently plausible context for this was as part of the struggle by the East Anglian bishops to transfer their see to Bury St Edmunds in the late eleventh century. Hoxne thus seems to provide a potent example of the dynamics behind the choice of a church’s patron saint, which was a symbolic attribute open to renegotiation.

Looking at the Æthelberht dedications more widely, their distribution is unsurprisingly focussed upon East Anglia (Fig. 19).¹⁵⁶ One might expect this martyr-king to have been especially culted within the region before the First Viking Age because his death, as later with Edmund, might have been used as a spiritual focus for opposition, in particular to the Mercians with whom the East Anglian kings were constantly involved in a struggle for initially supremacy and subsequently independence.

Two places are of more than passing interest. At Larling in Norfolk the possibility of a pre-Viking church has been raised by the discovery as a stray find of a late eighth-century whalebone panel fragment ‘of considerable quality’ from a book cover or possibly half a diptych (Fig. 20).¹⁵⁷ The depiction on the panel of Romulus and Remus being suckled by the she-wolf is echoed by the use of this

¹⁵² Williamson, *Origins of Norfolk*, pp. 156–9; Warner, ‘Shared churchyards’.

¹⁵³ For the will see Whitelock (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, no. 1. For Æthelberht see Farmer, ‘Some saints of East Anglia’, p. 39.

¹⁵⁴ Dodwell (ed.), *Charters of Norwich Cathedral Priory*, i, no. 112.

¹⁵⁵ Another bishop of East Anglia, Ælfric, left fenland ‘to the priests at Hoxne’ in his will of 1035×1040: Whitelock (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, no. 26. In 1086 Hoxne was an extensive nine carucate demesne belonging to the bishop and the church was recorded as ‘the episcopal seat for Suffolk’: *LDB*, fol. 379a. This detail has led James Campbell to suggest that Hoxne may in fact be the true location of *Dommoc*, the kingdom’s first see under Felix: Campbell, ‘East Anglian sees’, pp. 4–6.

¹⁵⁶ Three Æthelberht dedications are in the west, at Littledean (Glocs.) and Marden and Hereford (Herefs.). The remainder all occur in Norfolk and Suffolk with two in Essex: Arnold-Forster, *Studies in Church Dedications*.

¹⁵⁷ Webster and Backhouse (eds), *Making of England*, cat. no. 139. For a description of the plaque, see also Green, ‘An Anglo-Saxon bone plaque’.

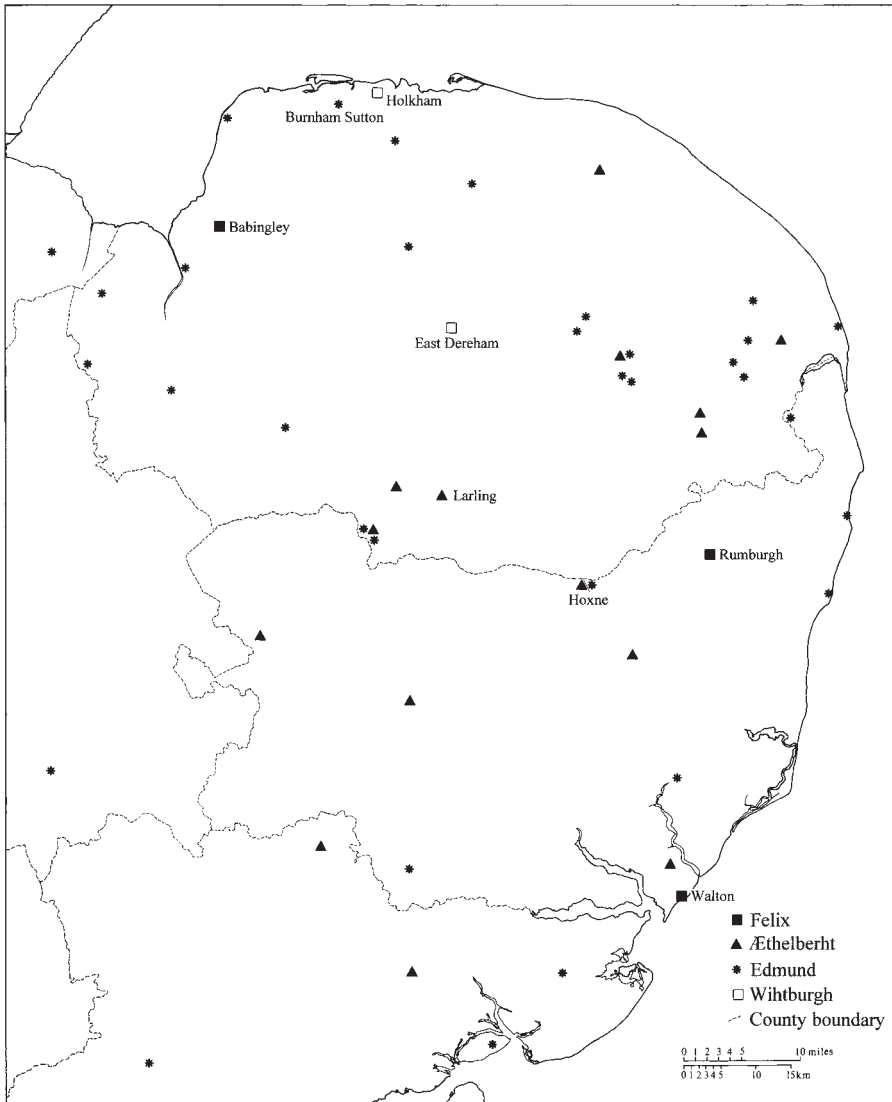


Fig. 19. The distribution of church dedications with saints important to East Anglia.

motif on Æthelberht's own coinage.¹⁵⁸ Although the Romulus and Remus motif is used elsewhere to symbolise the Church nourishing the faithful, the wolf may have been used iconographically by the East Anglian royal family for its totemic associations, their dynastic name the Wuffingas apparently being a variant of *Wulfingas*, 'the kin of the wolf'.¹⁵⁹ Similarly, the East Anglian King Ælfwald's pedigree claimed descent from Caesar, while later it was a wolf which was found guarding the head of King Edmund in *Haeligisdun* wood in Abbo's *Passio sancti*

¹⁵⁸ Keary and Poole, *Catalogue of English Coins*, p. 83 and pl. 14.2.

¹⁵⁹ Newton, *Origins of Beowulf*, pp. 105–6.

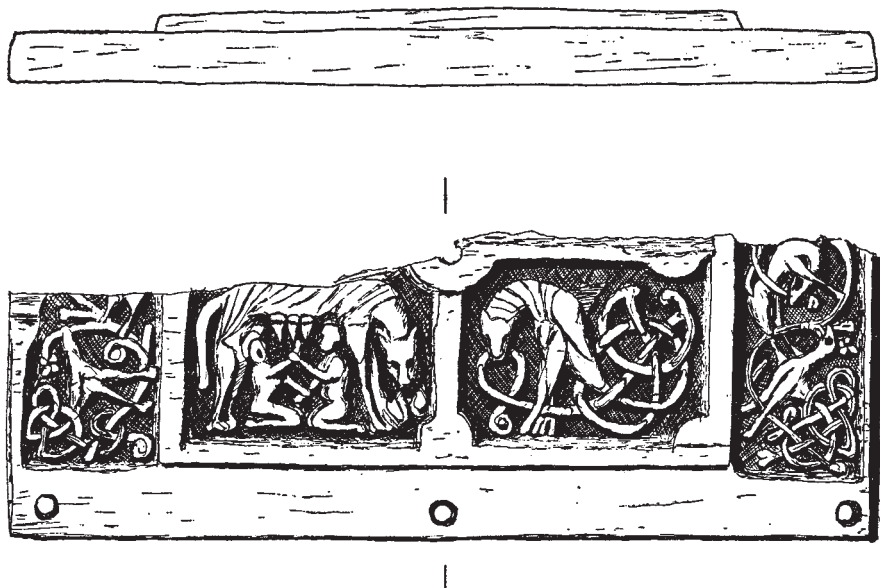


Fig. 20. Late eighth-century carved whalebone panel found near Larling church, Norfolk. Object length 72mm. Drawn by Bill Milligan.

Eadmundi (985×987). Antonia Gransden has seen Abbo's use of the wolf as an Insular version of a wild animal, paralleling the lion which guarded the body of St Mary of Egypt in the desert;¹⁶⁰ the choice may, though, have had a deeper logic as the family's traditional guardian animal. The appearance of the panel close to Larling church with other Middle Anglo-Saxon material is therefore remarkable and may indicate that an earlier community existed on the site.

The other important Æthelberht church is at Burnham Sutton in north-west Norfolk. The parish itself is of little note but forms one of the 'Burnhams' which probably represent a highly important multiple-estate centre which has yielded large quantities of early coinage and other prestige metalwork. Indeed, the 'productive' site at Burnham Market may represent an early *emporium* controlled by the East Anglian royal family.¹⁶¹ To have had a chapel subsidiary to the main church of this royal vill dedicated to the family's martyr-king Æthelberht would be entirely understandable.

If the Æthelberht dedications prove anything, it is the inconsistency with which they may be used. What can be said about them also goes for all the other dedications with an East Anglian interest. While the dedication to Wihtburh at East Dereham has already been mentioned, the example at Holkham in north-west Norfolk appears to have little significance. At Domesday, Holkham was split between six different holdings, several of which appear to have owed jurisdiction to the king who held large manors at Burnham (to the west) and

¹⁶⁰ Gransden, 'Abbo of Fleury's *Passio Sancti Eadmundi*', p. 38.

¹⁶¹ Rogerson, 'Six outstanding Middle Anglo-Saxon sites', pp. 114–15.

Wighton (to the south-east).¹⁶² Like Burnham Sutton, we may see here an instance of a former chapelry attached to a *monasterium* bearing the name of a saintly East Anglian royal.

For the other pre-Viking figures, Felix and Botolph, there were different fortunes. Felix is found used as a dedication at only six churches, two occurring in North Yorkshire (at Felixkirk and Kirkby Ravensworth). Of the remaining four, only one is in Norfolk, at Babingley in the north-west of the county. According to a late thirteenth-century Bury St Edmunds document, *Liber Albus* (BL Harleian MS 1005), Felix is attributed to have ‘maden . . . the halige kirke’ there.¹⁶³ The spread of Ipswich ware which has been found near the church is of little significance given the ubiquity of this pottery in East Anglia and the frequency with which it appears near churches.¹⁶⁴ The significance of a Felix dedication here is therefore open to interpretation; it seems likely that the dedication itself may have influenced the tradition of *Liber Albus*. The other three Felix dedications all occur in Suffolk, at Hallowtree (now extinct as a parish) and at Walton and Rumburgh.¹⁶⁵ The use of Felix at Walton seems likely to be the most significant, given the claims of this site to have been *Dommoc*. Any church here may well have been founded by the bishop and therefore potentially have come to be dedicated to him in later years. Episcopal involvement is almost certainly reflected in another, post-Viking, foundation, at Rumburgh in Suffolk. A Benedictine priory was founded here 1047×1064 by Æthelmær, bishop of Elmham and Rumburgh’s mother house, Holm St Benet’s Abbey in Norfolk, and bore the dedication to SS Michael and Felix.¹⁶⁶

Dedications to St Botolph are far less useful due to their greater frequency and are therefore not plotted in Fig. 19. While certain examples appear at early church sites suggested by other evidence, for instance Iken St Botolph’s probably being the pre-Viking *monasterium* of *Icanho*, Botolph enjoyed widespread devotion, and a large number of churches bearing his dedication at city gates suggests that he may have been especially patronised by travellers.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² See for instance *LDB*, fols 170b and 192b (repeated at 194b), and possibly also fol. 146a.

¹⁶³ Quoted in Williamson, *Origins of Norfolk*, p. 144 as deriving from another Bury document, BL Add. MS 14847. This latter document, actually known as the *Registrum Album* (*contra* Williamson), is of late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century date. Its tract on the dedications of chapels at fols 20v–21v is abstracted from fol. 195 of *Liber Albus*, written in a rough fourteenth-century hand: Thomson, *The Archives of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds*, pp. 121–3 and 142–5. For a general account of Babingley see Moralee, ‘Babingley and the birth of Christianity’.

¹⁶⁴ Chapter 2, pp. 28–30. For the pottery see also Andrews, ‘Middle Saxon Norfolk’, p. 16. For spreads appearing next to churches see the results of a selective study in Wade-Martins, *Village Sites in Launditch Hundred*.

¹⁶⁵ According to Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, iii, p. 405, a church dedicated to St Felix is said to have existed in Dunwich and to have been granted to Eye Priory in its foundation charter. In fact, neither the foundation charter of c.1087, nor its confirmation of c.1120 mentions any church of St Felix: Brown (ed.), *Eye Priory Cartulary and Charters I*, pp. 12 and 14. This claim by Dugdale would appear to owe more to an assumption that Dunwich was the ancient site of *Dommoc* and should therefore have had a church dedicated to Felix. For a propagation of the Dunwich/St Felix error see also Binns, *Dedications of Monastic Houses in England and Wales 1066–1216*, pp. 96–7, who states that ‘at the time of the Domesday survey, there was only one church in Dunwich, dedicated to St Felix’. Domesday mentions no dedication for any of the three churches in the manor by 1086: *LDB*, fol. 311b.

¹⁶⁶ See further Chapter 4, pp. 125–6.

¹⁶⁷ Butler, ‘Church dedications’, p. 45.

This later medieval use is also a feature of Edmund dedications. Edmund may well have proved popular for early post-Viking dedications, as part of the wider devotion to the saint witnessed also by the memorial coinage. This cannot, unfortunately, help us to identify early churches which altered their dedication for such purposes. Moreover, it is clear that the distribution and use of churches dedicated to Edmund had other dynamics. There is, remarkably, a general absence of churches so dedicated in west Suffolk, the very area of St Edmund's Liberty. But, the abbey did use its patron saint's name to indicate ownership on occasion. At Southwold in Suffolk, for example, Abbot Samson established a chaplain and chapel to St Edmund in 1206, apparently following the wrenching of Southwold from the *parochia* of nearby Wangford, by then a Cluniac dependency of St Mary's Priory, Thetford.¹⁶⁸ Similarly, Caistor by Norwich is better known as Caistor St Edmund, the church there being the only holding of the abbey at Domesday to have an Edmund-dedicated church.¹⁶⁹ The growth of Edmund's cult nationally is more likely to account for many of the dedications, only 40% (28 of 70 medieval examples) occurring in the ancient East Anglian kingdom of Norfolk and Suffolk. This ongoing devotion to Edmund is seen, for instance, in his dedication being used at Holme Pierrepont in Nottinghamshire, established as late as Henry VII's reign (1485–1509).

CONCLUSION

In discussions of its pre-Viking Age Anglo-Saxon history, East Anglia is always likely to remain something of a black hole. However, the evidence reviewed here suggests that the First Viking Age did not constitute a crushing blow to the spiritual life of the East Anglian population, nor did it pave the way for a mass migration of Scandinavians. Instead, it points to a measure of continuity with pre-Viking Age institutions, and an awareness of local religious heritage. The strength of this tradition permitted the maintenance of a political identity, seen in the St Edmund memorial coinage, and ultimately in the conversion of the new Viking masters themselves beyond the convention of baptism that accompanied political settlement.

Of principal interest is the way in which religious life survived. Viking activity was undoubtedly responsible for the looting of sites and severe disruption to the wider administrative background to the Church. The gap in our historical sources provides ample evidence for the impact which the Vikings must have had on church archives. Indeed, the capture of books by Vikings is another factor which may have contributed to a lacuna in the production of manuscripts. An

¹⁶⁸ Davis (ed.), *Kalendar of Abbot Samson*, no. 130; Warner, *Origins of Suffolk*, pp. 133–4.

¹⁶⁹ Caistor St Edmund church lies within the walls of the Roman town of *Venta Icenorum*. This location, and the Middle Anglo-Saxon 'productive' site immediately outside the walls hints at an early estate centre typical of the sort of land endowment Bury might wish to receive. For a discussion of the possible estates in the immediate vicinity see Penn, *Excavations on the Norwich Southern Bypass 1989–91*, pp. 101–5. The Edmund dedication at Caistor may well represent the renaming of an earlier church to express the abbey's takeover of the place: Pestell, 'The afterlife', pp. 130–1.

eighth-century Kentish gospel-book demonstrates this appositely. It was seized and then ransomed from the Vikings in the third quarter of the ninth century, after which it was given to Christ Church, Canterbury.¹⁷⁰ There are other instances of eighth-century manuscripts which had found new homes by the tenth century, several Northumbrian ones reappearing in the south.¹⁷¹ It is difficult to know the circumstances behind their relocation, given the large timespan involved, and they need indicate only raiding rather than the wholesale destruction of institutions which were therefore unable to buy back such works. However, it also raises fundamental questions about the ways in which we have reconstructed the history of the period and the impact of the Scandinavians. The impact upon documentary sources at one level may indicate the extent to which the organization of the Church relied upon transmission of the written word to maintain its structures and cohesion. At another level it speaks of the influence such document-driven evidence has had upon our own interpretations, reconstructed from a society similarly influenced by records. What effect the Vikings might have had on the ground to a Christian population and their clerics is rather different to our knowledge of episcopal control over their dioceses. The presence of Theodred, bishop of London, acting as diocesan to East Anglia, has been most commonly cited in support of this model of a wider breakdown. This fails to acknowledge the survival of more local power structures addressing the wider spiritual needs of the region's population, or wider knowledge of Theodred's position of plurality.

Perhaps most notable is an examination from where our sources derive. Almost without exception, they are from Benedictine monasteries, and this is especially true for East Anglia where documentary sources reappear not in the tenth century but in the eleventh, with the foundation of communities at Bury St Edmunds and Holm St Benet's. This does not mean that the clerical communities existing alongside these did not produce documents of their own. However, their gradual disappearance as institutions, probably by the twelfth century, gave little chance for the survival of their texts compared to those of the Benedictine abbeys – and even in these latter houses, the earliest manuscripts had problematical survival rates.

Because many Middle Anglo-Saxon *monasteria* were centred on and integrated into local estates belonging to the local and regional aristocracy, it was never likely that wider political conquest would lead to widespread apostasy or the disintegration of the Church (unless, of course, the entire local and regional aristocracy had been completely annihilated). The lack of a new, distinctively Scandinavian, material culture similarly indicates the survival of an Anglo-Saxon population in which religious life was maintained. Instead, the post-Viking period saw an increasing concern by West Saxon rulers, culminating with Edgar, to tie in local centres to royal government. Examples like the *monasterium* at Horningsea demonstrate the embedded nature of familial religious communities in the landscape, a feature to be rejected by reformists sponsoring Benedictine

¹⁷⁰ Now Stockholm, Kungliga Biblioteket, MS A.135. See also Harmer (ed. and transl.), *Select English Historical Documents*, pp. 46–7.

¹⁷¹ Dumville, *Liturgy and the Ecclesiastical History*, p. 105.

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monasticism. This new movement aimed not simply to regenerate spiritual life and values, but to break away from local communities with attached prebends. The new order not only had to be different, but to be seen to be different. If the First Viking Age was to have any long-term consequences upon the Church, it was a recognition of the need to codify the religious life. It was this codification that was to yield from the wide spectrum of *monasteria* on the one hand the regular Benedictine life of the monastery, and on the other the secular minsters of the tenth and eleventh centuries.

Monastic Reform and Religious Life in the Later Anglo-Saxon Period

BY 1066 a new class of religious institution had not only been established within the Anglo-Saxon landscape, but owned vast tracts of it. Monastic life led according to strict precepts, as exemplified in the Rule of St Benedict of Nursia (c.480–550), was not new to the tenth century:¹ in Bede we find a champion of a strict cenobitic life from an earlier age, railing as he did against ‘false monasteries’ in his letter of 734 to Archbishop Ecgberht.² However, the tenth-century monastic reform saw a new approach to religious life, principally through its codification and imposition in a national rather than a regional context. This ‘regularisation’ of communities according to the Benedictine Rule means we may at last speak of ‘monasticism’ in the sense that it was understood after the Norman Conquest (Fig. 21). Equally important in considering the wider ecclesiastical landscape is that those many *monasteria* which had survived the First Viking Age continued to exist alongside these new monasteries. An added dynamic to the relationship between the patronage of these two types of community was the increasing move towards new proprietary church foundations being made by an emerging thegnly class. This trend was especially strong in East Anglia, giving rise to the exceptional numbers of parish churches the region had by the High Middle Ages. The arrival of Benedictinism in East Anglia therefore requires examination on several levels.

Reform has been a continual theme in religious life but the dramatic burst in activity from the mid-tenth century is largely attributable to the policy of King Edgar (959–75).³ That this patronage coincided with a period of important political change in the emerging Anglo-Saxon nation state is no coincidence, and

¹ However, the *Regula sancti Benedicti* seems to have been of limited influence earlier. The Rule actually survives in three distinct recensions, the *textus primus* derived from Benedict’s original, a *textus interpolatus* produced at Rome c.600, normalising Benedict’s vulgar Latin, and the *textus receptus*, a mixed recension of the former two, emerging from the early ninth-century Carolingian reform circles. The *textus primus* is unknown in Anglo-Saxon England while the *textus interpolatus* is known only from one surviving manuscript written in Mercia c.700 (now Oxford, Bodleian MS Hatton 48). By contrast, the *textus receptus* of the *Regula* is known from eleven English MSS all written c.950–c.1100 and so mixed that their textual histories are untraceable. This Carolingian tradition was therefore known from a far larger number of copies than have survived: Lapidge and Winterbottom (eds and transl.), *Wulfstan of Winchester*, pp. lii–liii.

² *EHD*, i, no. 170.

³ Knowles saw ultimate responsibility for the beginnings of a monastic revival lying with King Edmund (939–46), who appointed Dunstan abbot of Glastonbury c.940: *Monastic Order in England*, p. 31. Dunstan’s development of a monastic life based on the Benedictine Rule must not, though, be confused with a nationwide policy of religious renewal.

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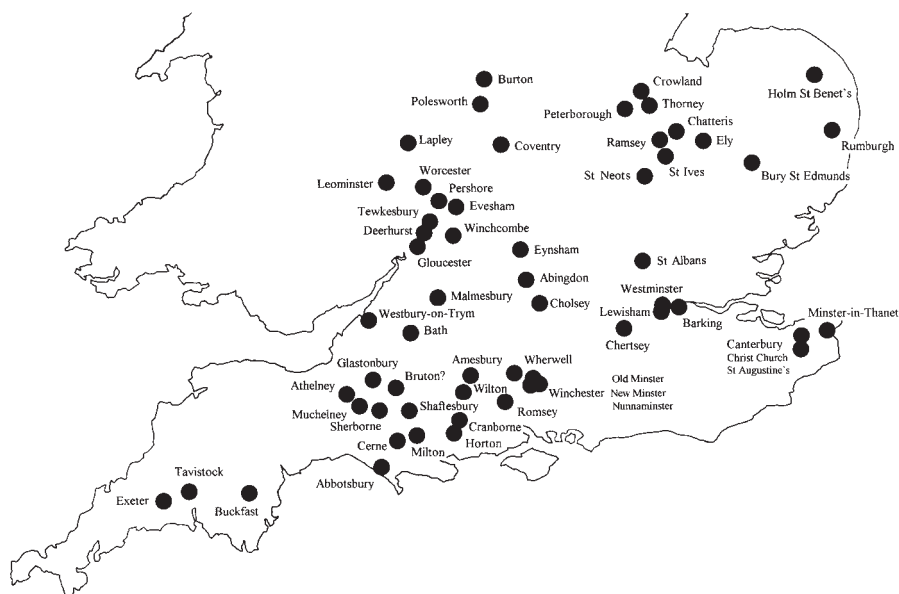


Fig. 21. The distribution of Benedictine monasteries in England 1066.

Edgar's religious concerns need to be scrutinised in the context of secular politics. Although the nominal creation of an English state had been achieved by the house of Wessex under Alfred's son Edward the Elder (899–924) and grandson Æthelstan (924–39), regionalism remained a strong and potent force. When it manifested itself in the reign of Eadwig (955–9), whose kingship was rejected by the Mercians in 957, Edgar was instead chosen to be their king. On Eadwig's death two years later Edgar succeeded his brother as king of all England. Although Edgar's reign was to unify the various regions of England still further, the divisions visible at the start of his kingship illustrate the degree of competition between rival political factions and the need for strong personal rule.⁴ Of central importance was the negotiation of tensions between the West Saxon and Mercian parties, and it was in this process that the monastic reform came to have a crucial role.

Religious life had always been dominated by the royal and aristocratic families of the various kingdoms, as founders, patrons and inmates of *monasteria*. A way to restrict their power and create a more unified Church, strengthening Edgar's hand, was to create religious institutions (often with judicial powers) directly answerable to the king.⁵ The adoption of reformed monasticism offered a means of achieving this. The policy was initiated in 964 according to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, with the expulsion of the priestly communities in Chertsey, Milton Abbas and the New and Old Minsters of Winchester.⁶ In their place were installed

⁴ Yorke, 'Æthelwold and the politics'.

⁵ John, 'King and the monks', p. 175. For the implementation of cults as part of this see Rollason, 'Relic-cults as an instrument of royal policy'.

⁶ Garmonsway (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, p. 116.

monks without personal prebends, the old livings now forming a corporate endowment. More crucially, these new Benedictine monasteries owed their existence and loyalty to Edgar. The implementation of this policy in Mercian areas has been explored from different perspectives, in two important papers thirty years apart by D. J. V. Fisher and Nicholas Banton.⁷ The basis of Banton's case is that from about 970, in creating reformed houses in Mercia owing their loyalty to the West Saxon crown, regional religious identity could be subsumed and royal government strengthened. For Fisher, the reaction to the reformed monasteries after Edgar's death, when many were plundered and their land taken away from them, was as much a political reaction by the Mercian faction led by Ealdorman Ælfhere against West Saxon 'English' kingship as against the Church. Edgar's policy may also have been intended, in the Fenland basin, to have provided a counterbalance to members of the influential family of Æthelstan 'Half-king', notably Ealdorman Æthelwine who had maintained political control over much of the land built up by Æthelstan in his East Anglian ealdordom.⁸

Of interest in considering the monastic geography of East Anglia is the location of the reformed Benedictine houses. Crowland, Deerhurst, Evesham, Pershore, Peterborough, Ramsey, St Albans, Thorney, Westminster, Winchcombe and Worcester were all in a fundamentally Mercian sphere of influence and to this list we should add Ely.⁹ The dating of some of these foundations to c.970 with certainty is problematic,¹⁰ but the pattern is clear as is the relative timescale: Benedictine foundations in the latter part of Edgar's reign are Mercian in distribution and appear to confirm a royal policy using monasteries to cement his position in the kingdom (Fig. 22). Edgar's second, 'imperial', coronation of 973 reiterates this integration. The event was staged at Bath, not only a reformed monastery, but strategically positioned on the borders of Wessex and Mercia, and the service utilised a specially composed coronation *ordo* echoing Carolingian consecration rituals.¹¹

That the monastic reform movement was enmeshed within *Realpolitik* should occasion no surprise. A similar policy appears to have been effected in Normandy from the end of the tenth century. Here, the core Norman area around Rouen came to absorb and subsume the wider area of Normandy through 'upper-Norman' ducal monasteries gaining 'lower-Norman' religious houses and their lands, and

⁷ Fisher, 'The anti-monastic reaction' (from 1952); Banton, 'Monastic reform and the unification' (from 1982).

⁸ John, 'King and the monks', pp. 154–80; Hart, 'Æthelstan Half-king', especially at pp. 586–92.

⁹ Banton describes Ely as Mercian: 'Monastic reform and the unification', p. 77. One may take exception to this given its East Anglian history and traditions, but the nature of this border area between Mercia and East Anglia is explored further below. I prefer for the present to use the term 'sphere of influence' rather than 'territory'.

¹⁰ For instance the dating of Westminster's refoundation to 971 is uncertain and the charter, S 670, is dated 951. Banton, apparently following Napier and Stevenson, suggests there is a scribal error for 971: Banton, 'Monastic reform and the unification', p. 77 and n. 35; Napier and Stevenson (eds), *Crawford Collection of Early Charters and Documents*, p. 90. As Dorothy Whitelock pointed out, this date has 'no firm basis' and the forged charter S 1450 based upon S 670 has a witness list which could date between 963 and 972: Whitelock, 'Some Anglo-Saxon bishops', p. 22 and n. 6. Sawyer and its updated electronic version suggest 959 as the correct date.

¹¹ Brookes, *Early History of the Church of Canterbury*, p. 248; Jones, 'Significance of the regal consecration'; Stafford, *Unification and Conquest*, p. 56.

Landscapes of Monastic Foundation

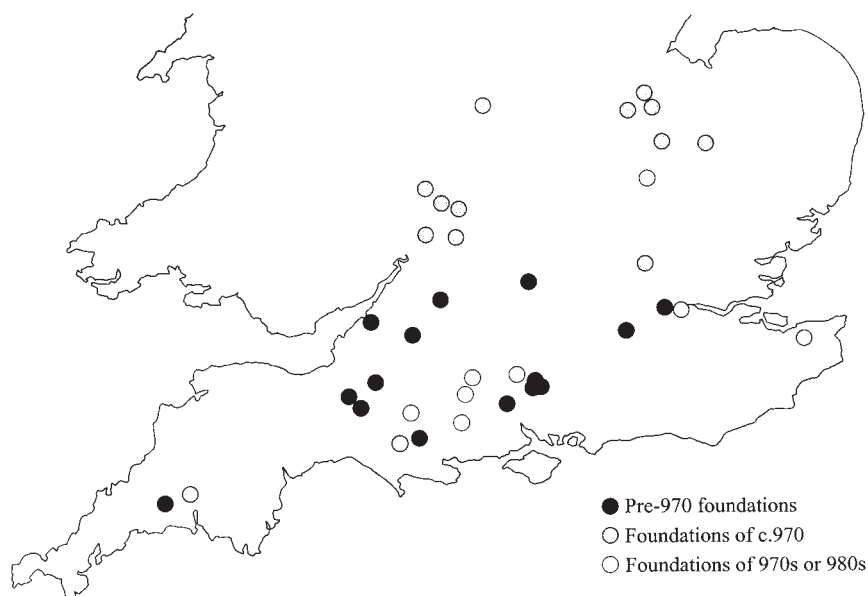


Fig. 22. Benedictine monasteries founded before 970, those founded c.970, and subsequent foundations by leading protagonists of the Reform movement.

adopting and spreading the previously local cults of these houses.¹² What is important from an East Anglian perspective is the influence Benedictine monasticism had on the religious geography of the region. An investigation of this requires discussion not just of those houses in the East Anglian heartland to which we have hitherto restricted ourselves, but the wider expanses of the Fenland basin. A key feature of the reformed monasteries, which was to cause such problems on Edgar's death, was the provision of a large land endowment for each foundation. The consequent massive redistribution of estates and their wealth led many of the leading reformers to become land barons, often aggressively acquisitive, leading to much local resentment. The succession of legal disputes that resulted occasioned the production of many forged charters supporting claims to land title.¹³ The net result has been that many reformed houses have been discussed by historians interested in the nature of land ownership and legal aspects associated with charter evidence.¹⁴

These are undoubtedly important questions, but they have tended to minimise a contextual examination of these houses and their landholdings, placing the reformed foundations in the wider physical and political landscape. This is of immediate importance in the Eastern region because the geographical proximity

¹² Potts, 'When the saints go marching'.

¹³ Under different circumstances, a desire to prove title to land in the wake of the Norman Conquest also provided a stimulus for forged charters especially by those houses like Ely which were regarded as too sympathetic to the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy by suspicious new Norman masters.

¹⁴ As with Thorney (Raban, *The Estates of Thorney and Crowland*), Ramsey (Raftis, *The Estates of Ramsey Abbey*), Peterborough (King, *Peterborough Abbey 1086–1310*) and Ely (Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*).

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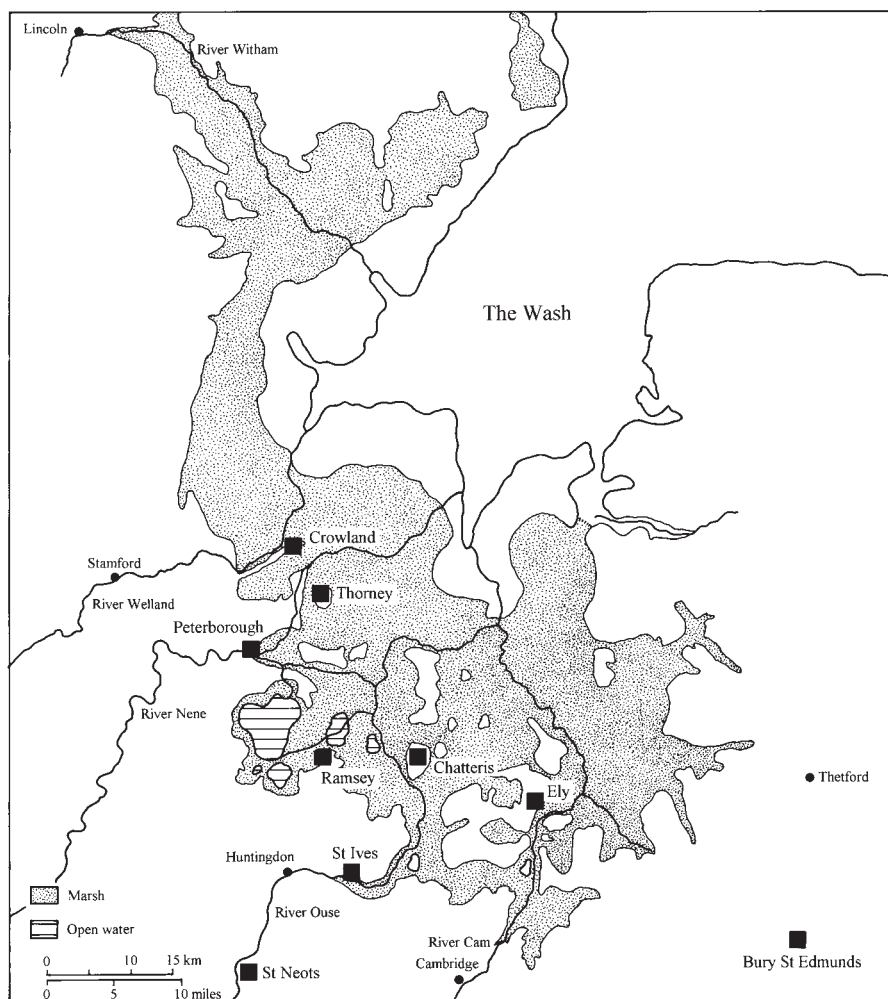


Fig. 23. The geography of the Fenland Benedictine monasteries.

of the monasteries is so clear (Fig. 23). Crowland and Thorney are only five miles apart; Peterborough is seven miles from Crowland, six from Thorney and only twenty-six miles from Ely; Ramsey is sixteen miles from Ely, and Ely is only twenty-two miles from Bury. Benedictine monasticism therefore had a fundamental impact upon the landscape of the Fens. Why were they so placed, what was their relationship with each other and what does this tell us about the place of East Anglia in the developing Anglo-Saxon state? In particular, the foundation and role of Bury St Edmunds require re-evaluation. Both Ely and Bury were important shrines with relics of East Anglian royal saints, yet Ely, as we have seen, was apparently Mercian territory by the tenth century.¹⁵ The claims that have been made for Bury's tenth-century regularisation might similarly place this

¹⁵ Above, n. 9.

East Anglian community into a wider political sphere of influence, if Banton's arguments for Benedictinism representing political unification are to be upheld.¹⁶ The difficulty with this case is underlined by the persistent tradition that Bury was regularised by monks from Holm St Benet's in Norfolk, a monastery of uncertain foundation date but normally considered to belong to the 1020s. An earlier Benedictine foundation for either or both houses potentially broadens the geographical area which Edgar was attempting to integrate within the West Saxon 'English' kingship.

Some continuity with Insular monastic traditions has been argued for, but the patronage of Benedictine monasticism brought many other new and distinctive elements.¹⁷ The influence of Continental reform was to be seen everywhere, ranging from the personnel involved¹⁸ to other, outward, manifestations such as new forms of religious observance and cult. The requirements of liturgical books and kalendars to support this saw a significant importation of books from Continental reformed houses.¹⁹ The influence of these was felt more widely with the adoption of new script forms based on Carolingian minuscule. The imitation of such Continental forms may not have been simply an attempt by the English reformers to produce books visibly different from Insular examples; by using the new 'Anglo-Caroline' script, they gave themselves a badge of ecclesiastical renewal.²⁰ Identity appears to have been constructed in clothing too; on the basis of manuscript illustrations, bishops, archbishops and monks now wore distinctive cowed habits, standing out from those in secular clothing.²¹ With these factors in mind, it is appropriate to investigate how a Benedictine monastery may have been manifested physically. There has, after all, long been an interest in the architectural elements to monasteries, and in particular on the development of claustral groundplans.²² The lack of detailed excavated evidence makes this difficult to assess for pre-Conquest English, let alone East Anglian, monasteries. However, the wider use of the landscape has frequently been overlooked. Increasing awareness of how landscapes could be manipulated and invested with iconographic meaning makes a consideration of the topography of reformed monasteries essential. In particular, can they be seen to differ from the *monasteria* of past ages, and

¹⁶ For the arguments over Bury's foundation see further below, pp. 112–16.

¹⁷ For the question of continuity see Gransden, 'Traditionalism and continuity'.

¹⁸ All three of the principal English reformers were heavily influenced by Continental practices. Dunstan was briefly exiled c.939 by King Edmund and again under King Eadwig c.956. After an initial stay with Arnulf, Count of Flanders, he found refuge at the recently reformed monastery of Blandinium at Ghent before being recalled to England in 957 by Edgar who made him bishop of Worcester, then London, and finally archbishop of Canterbury in 958: Knowles, *Monastic Order in England*, p. 39. Although Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester had no extended stay abroad, he gained a reputation as a more ideological reformer, pursuing stricter ideals than Dunstan. He had sent one of his disciples, Osgar, to the prominent reformed house of Fleury, had summoned monks from Corbie, and was well aware of Continental reform ideas and ideology: Wormald, 'Æthelwold and his Continental counterparts'. Oswald, later bishop of Worcester, was of Danish extraction, and related to two archbishops of York, St Oda and Oscytel. It was Oda who sent the young Oswald, anxious for a more disciplined life, to Fleury c.950, until recalled from there by his uncle in 958.

¹⁹ Dumville, *Liturgy and the Ecclesiastical History of Late Anglo-Saxon England*.

²⁰ Dumville, *English Caroline Script*, p. 7.

²¹ Owen-Crocker, *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 171.

²² Introduction, pp. 5–6 above.

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if so, in what ways? To understand the impact of the Benedictine reforms, and the monastic geography of East Anglia, we must begin by defining when these communities first came into existence.

THE FOUNDATION OF EAST ANGLIA'S BENEDICTINE MONASTERIES

East Anglia, in the strict sense of its Middle Anglo-Saxon kingdom, had five Benedictine houses by 1066; Bury St Edmunds, Clare, Ely, Holm St Benet's and Rumburgh.²³ However, of direct relevance to these are a number of other monasteries in the wider environs of Eastern England, namely Chatteris, Crowland, Peterborough, Ramsey, St Ives, St Neots and Thorney. Chatteris, Clare, Rumburgh and St Ives may be dated to the eleventh century,²⁴ leaving eight houses with possible tenth-century origins. Of these, five – Crowland, Ely, Peterborough, Ramsey and Thorney – appear to have been founded c.970.

The evidence for Thorney and Peterborough's foundation is based on Wulfstan of Winchester's *Vita Sancti Æthelwoldi*, composed c.996×1000. Although the author uses only three dates, the work appears to have been written in a strictly chronological sequence, from which it seems that Peterborough and Thorney were founded before the translation of St Swithun's relics into the Old Minster at Winchester on 15 July 971.²⁵ Ramsey was founded by Ealdorman Æthelwine of East Anglia (ruled 962–90),²⁶ in association with Bishop Oswald, the twelve monks established there being transferred from Westbury-on-Trym, Glocs. The chronology is problematical but because the transfer occurred five years after Westbury's foundation in either 963 or 964, a date of 969 is likely.²⁷

Crowland's foundation by Abbot Thurketil²⁸ is normally placed c.970 partly,

²³ The claims for a sixth house, at Thetford, are considered below, pp. 124–5.

²⁴ See below, pp. 122–7 and 131–8.

²⁵ Lapidge and Winterbottom (eds and transl.), *Wulfstan of Winchester*, p. xl. Peterborough's charter evidence is unspectacular, the earliest, of AD 664 and 680 (S 68 and 72), both being forgeries. The next charter, dated to 972 (S 787) is a grant of privileges for the abbey and its lands, and confirmation of other landholdings, generally considered to be spurious (Sawyer, pp. 251–2). Other early gifts are datable only to Æthelwold's lifetime, and therefore to as late as 984: Hart, *Early Charters of Eastern England*, pp. 110–12. Hugh Candidus of Peterborough included a number of other charters in his *Chronicle*, composed c.1175, but these date from c.985: Mellows and Mellows (eds and transl.), *The Peterborough Chronicle*, pp. ix–x; Hart, *Early Charters of Eastern England*, p. 244; nos 345–7. Thorney's charter evidence is similarly uncertain, but its earliest charter, purporting to date from 973 (S 792), is generally regarded as spurious. Cyril Hart, with characteristic generosity, has suggested that it has an authentic basis: *ibid.*, pp. 173–86.

²⁶ Æthelwine's career is discussed further in Hart, 'Æthelstan Half-king' pp. 133–7. Unusually for such a powerful figure at this time, he was fortunate to have been able to retire from politics in 990, rather than be killed. He died on 24 April 992.

²⁷ Lapidge, 'Abbot Germanus, Winchcombe, Ramsey', p. 118.

²⁸ David Knowles suggested that Æthelwold was primarily responsible, but this has not been generally accepted: Knowles, *Monastic Order in England*, p. 51; Raban, 'Property of Thorney and Crowland Abbeys' and *Estates of Thorney and Crowland*; Yorke, 'Introduction', p. 4 n. 28. Thurketil was an intimate of Dunstan, Oswald and Æthelwold, and a relation of Archbishop Osgytel of York. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* 'B' records Thurketil as Archbishop Osgytel's kinsman who 'carried the bishop's body to Bedford, since he was abbot there in those days': Garmonsway (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon*

one suspects, by analogy with the other Fenland houses. Its history has been greatly confused by the writings of the so-called 'Pseudo-Ingulph', a fifteenth-century forger claiming to be the eleventh-century abbot Ingulph, whose work may include some factual information buried near-impenetrably within a majority of fraudulent material.²⁹ Crowland's origin appears to lie in the 970s, Thurketyl giving six estates from his patrimony as an endowment for Crowland, which represented over half its property by 1086.³⁰

Ely's refoundation as a Benedictine monastery is normally dated to 970 on the basis of four royal charters in its favour (S 776, 779, 780 and 781). All are of gifts by King Edgar dated 970, and while the authenticity of S 776 and 779 has been questioned, S 780 (a grant of land at Linden End in Aldreth, Cambs.) and S 781 (granting land at Stoke near Ipswich) are more generally accepted as genuine.³¹ This dating is consistent with the activities of Ely's first abbot, Byrhtnoth, in increasing his monastery's endowment both in land (for instance he appears regularly in *Libellus Æthelwoldi episcopi*) and by appropriating the relics of Wihtburh from *Derham* in 974. His activity at Ely seems corroborated by the foundation of St Neot's Priory at Eynesbury, Hunts., as a cell 975×984.³² Byrhtnoth may have been prior at the Old Minster in Winchester from 964 until his election to Ely c.970. He remained at Ely until his death on 5 May 996×999.³³ Byrhtnoth must have been a close ally of Æthelwold and probably acted, effectively, as the bishop's agent in the area.

This intensity in foundation activity occurring within a few years and in a tight geographical area must have sent shock-waves throughout the wider region, not least due to the massive accumulation of landholdings by these new monasteries. It has led, unsurprisingly, to the suggestion that the one other major religious community in the east, at Bury St Edmunds, only twenty-two miles from Ely, was also regularised as a Benedictine monastery at this time, and with it brought direct West Saxon influence to bear in East Anglia.

The regularisation of Bury St Edmunds' Abbey

There is little good early charter evidence for the Benedictine origins of Bury St Edmunds. There are, moreover, many later traditions, distorted and biased as a result of the eleventh-century propaganda war between the East Anglian bishops and the abbot of Bury St Edmunds, during their dispute over where to locate the region's see. More certain is that a religious community existed here by at least

Chronicle, p. 119. According to *Liber Eliensis* (ii, 31) Thurketel was expelled from Bedford and then entered the household of the bishop of London. In Book Four of his *Ecclesiastical History*, Orderic Vitalis subsequently refers to him as Thurketel of London: Chibnall (ed. and transl.), *Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, ii, pp. 340–1.

²⁹ Roffe, '*Historia Croylandensis*'; Searle, *Ingulf and the Historia Croylandensis*.

³⁰ Raban, *Estates of Thorney and Crowland*, pp. 8–15.

³¹ For S 779 see Pope, 'Ælfric and the Old English version' especially at pp. 96–7, following John, 'Some alleged charters', in considering an authentic original. It is also accepted as genuine by Kennedy, 'Law and litigation', pp. 150–1.

³² See further below, pp. 122–3.

³³ Knowles *et al.*, *Heads of Religious Houses I*, p. 44.

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the mid-tenth century, as attested by bequests in Bishop Theodred's will of 942×951 and a further legacy by Ælfgar (946×951).³⁴ Unequivocal evidence for a Benedictine monastery at Bury does not appear until the known consecration of the church in 1032. Between these two dates lies the regularisation of the community.

The evidence which bears upon the Benedictinisation is either indirect or much later. Most often cited is the tradition that Bury was established by half of the Benedictine community based at Holm St Benet's in Norfolk c.1020. This story does not appear to have become current at Bury until the thirteenth century when an arrangement of confraternity between the two houses is first attested, in the Customary of St Edmunds c.1234.³⁵ The colonisation story is also found at St Benet's in the thirteenth century,³⁶ although the tradition is likely to have had an earlier origin as a version appears in *Liber Eliensis* (1169×1174):

Hereupon by the king's own command he [Bishop Ælfwine] first led a band of monks to Bury and settled there, some from his church of Ely and some indeed from Holm, and, with the assistance of Earl Thurkill, abundantly provided maintenance for them. Moreover, when on his part he had brought together so very many objects and ornaments to that place, he released them [the monks] to eternal freedom and set over them a father and abbot named Uvius, a humble, modest and pious man.³⁷

Since there is little other than this tradition to link Ely and Bury (despite their close proximity), Ely may simply have heard the tradition and modified itself into being Bury's parent house to seek the latter's reflected glory. Antonia Gransden has argued that the seed of the colonisation story may have been a Norwich tract made during the eleventh-century dispute over the relocation of the East Anglian see. She argues that because the tract is known first from a Bury document, *Liber Albus* (BL Harley MS 1005), where in a hand of the 1260s or 1270s there is a statement that Bishop Ælfwine made a monk of St Benet's the prior of Bury (fols 197–197v), Bury monks might have adapted this. They would have supplied the name Ufi (whom they believed was their first abbot), amending his rank from prior (the head of a cathedral priory whose superior was the diocesan) to abbot.³⁸

³⁴ Whitelock (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, nos 1 and 2.

³⁵ BL MS Harley 1005. See Gransden, 'Legends and traditions', p. 97. Such confraternities were a characteristic of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries and the arrangement was particularly explored in the fourteenth century after the Peasant's Revolt forced several of Bury's monks to seek a more secure temporary home.

³⁶ Sadly there are few books known from St Benet's library to help with any reconstruction of its earliest historical traditions. Of those six volumes listed by Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain*, p. 102, one single volume dates from the twelfth century (Longleat, Marquis of Bath MS 2), while another (BL Egerton 3142) has some thirteenth-century material bound in with fourteenth- and fifteenth-century pages. The abbey's records are otherwise all later copies of exemplars of uncertain date. The abbey register (BL Cotton Galba E.ii) is similarly of late thirteenth-century date, c.1272×1280/82, although incorporating material apparently of the eleventh and twelfth centuries: West (ed.), *St Benet of Holme 1020–1210*, ii, p. 179. More recently a strong case has been advanced for a set of annals bound into a composite Cottonian volume, Vitellius D.ix, to have been written at St Benet's: Luxford, 'A forgotten medieval Benedictine manuscript'. The annals date to the mid fourteenth century but have no useful information bearing on the Anglo-Saxon history of the house.

³⁷ *LE*, ii, 86.

³⁸ Gransden, 'Legends and traditions', p. 102. Interestingly, Harley 1005 has in the same quire as the abbey foundation story (V) extracts at fols 193–5 from *Liber Eliensis* concerning the kingdom of East

The confusion of these later sources obliges us to re-examine the limited Anglo-Saxon evidence. The writing of the *Passio sancti Eadmundi* by Abbo of Fleury while staying at Ramsey Abbey 985–7 has been the most frequent point of departure. The work is curious in showing a concern for the patron saint of another community and it was Antonia Gransden who suggested this as indicating the hand of Ramsey in Bury's regularisation.³⁹ Subsequently, David Dumville agreed with much of Gransden's work, seeing Abbo's *Passio* as implying 'an important connexion between Ramsey and Bury St Edmunds'.⁴⁰ Curiously, Gransden subsequently argued that if regularisation did not occur until the 1020s when Edmund's cult had grown, it may have been undertaken by Eadnoth, abbot of Ramsey and co-founder of St Ives and Chatteris.⁴¹ In this case it is difficult to see why such great emphasis should be put upon the *Passio* if Ramsey's actions or influence were not to bear fruit until over thirty years later.⁴² In an attempt to pursue the case, Gransden cited the geographical proximity of the two houses (despite Bury being nearer to Ely) and the fact that some of Ramsey's estates adjoined those held by Bury. This latter point may be dismissed swiftly. Those estates held by 1086 show only three close associations, at Hilgay and West Dereham in Norfolk, and Wisbech in Cambridgeshire (Fig. 24). Although some estates were lost by both Ramsey and Bury before 1086, if contiguous landholdings were to constitute an argument Ely would again be a far stronger contender as the parent community, having numerous landholdings close to Bury, not least as a consequence of its Liberty in south-east Suffolk. Gransden also cited St Edmund as figuring in a late tenth-century metrical calendar of Ramsey. Given the rise of Edmund's cult to national importance by this time, the calendar again hardly constitutes evidence for a special relationship. Finally, despite Ramsey's importance as a powerhouse of the monastic reform movement, its fortunes were closely tied to those of its secular protector, Ealdorman Æthelwine, and declined with his death in 992. These are hardly the bases from which to argue for a later Ramsey-inspired Benedictinisation of a nationally important cult centre.

Neither Antonia Gransden nor David Dumville have stated exactly what they believe the nature of the relationship between Ramsey and Bury to have been. By contrast, Bury had been growing in importance before Ramsey or any of the other Fenland houses had Benedictine communities. A possible indication of this

Anglia. These extracts are slightly later, being in a fourteenth-century hand: Thomson, *Archives of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds*, pp. 142–5.

³⁹ Gransden, 'Legends and traditions', pp. 100–1. However, as a similar principle, few people seem to have taken King Ælfwald commissioning Felix to write his *Life of Saint Guthlac* as evidence for eighth-century East Anglian claims over Mercian territory.

⁴⁰ Dumville, *English Caroline Script*, p. 36.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁴² A parallel to this writing of the *Passio* by a figure external to the house occurs with Byrhtferth of Ramsey's authorship of *Vita Oswaldi*. Although Oswald was the founder of Ramsey the commission for the *Life* was almost certainly set by Wulfstan of Worcester, later Archbishop Wulfstan II of York: Hart, 'Foundation of Ramsey abbey', p. 312. Despite Worcester being an established Benedictine monastery and York an archiepiscopal see, it appears neither place considered it had an author to match the great polemical writer Byrhtferth. If no-one else were entrusted with writing Oswald's *Life*, it seems not unreasonable that Edmund's community might similarly have commissioned the Continental scholar Abbo to write the *Passio* during his stay at Ramsey.

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Fig. 24. Landholdings of the Benedictine monasteries as recorded in Domesday Book.

survives from as early as 945, the date of a diploma of King Edmund (S 507).⁴³ This charter purports to grant the rare privilege of freeing all land around the monastery of tribute, the rarity of which privilege has led many to be suspicious of the charter's authenticity. Cyril Hart has suggested that it was not the forgery it was usually suggested to be and while subsequently appearing to distance himself from this, was coming back to the view by 1981.⁴⁴ Dumville has preferred not to commit himself on the issue, instead commenting in a footnote 'my colleagues Susan Kelly and Simon Keynes tell me that they see no diplomatic evidence which would lead them to question the authenticity of Edward's diploma'.⁴⁵

⁴³ The earliest known version of the charter is in a Bury document, Oxford Bodleian MS 297, the 'B' witness to John of Worcester's *Chronicle*; it is published in Darlington and McGurk (eds and transl.), *Chronicle of John of Worcester*, pp. 638–9.

⁴⁴ Hart, *Early Charters of Eastern England*, pp. 54–8; 'East Anglian chronicle', p. 277. For an earlier view of these privileges see Davis, 'Liberties of Bury St Edmunds'.

⁴⁵ Dumville, *English Caroline Script*, p. 38 n. 148.

In his tacit acceptance of the charter's authenticity, Dumville has seen two more phases to Bury's history, 'the transition, between 969 [the foundation of Ramsey] and 1016, to observance of the Benedictine Rule . . . and the developments in the reign of Cnut'.⁴⁶ While rejecting the foundation date of 1020 he has therefore accepted some involvement by Cnut in the consecration of the abbey church in 1032. This championing of an early Benedictinisation of Bury, for which there is no positive evidence, least of all traditions emanating from Bury itself, means the tradition of a Benedictine refoundation being imposed by Cnut c.1020 has to be contested. By contrast, Gransden has recently changed her mind from favouring a tenth-century foundation at Bury to one under Cnut.⁴⁷ The argument centres on several pieces of evidence, all somewhat scrappy or equivocal. First, there is the evidence for a Benedictine origin supplied in Bury's own documentation; second, the evidence of the charters granting land to both Bury St Edmunds and to Holm St Benet's in Norfolk; and third, the wider contextual evidence surrounding the significance of a minster being founded at *Assandon*, the site of the battle at which Cnut won the English throne.

Bury St Edmunds' accounts of its origins

Three Bury documents provide evidence for the 1020 Benedictinisation by Cnut. One, now Corpus Christi College, Oxford MS 197,⁴⁸ contains the earliest surviving copy of Æthelwold's version of the Benedictine Rule. The manuscript has several additions including a supplementary quire (fols 106–9) which includes a number of additional texts, nearly all documentary. This new use was started within the original codex, since on fol. 105 are added two annalistic historical notes. One describes under 1020 the regularisation of Bury, the other, for 1032, the consecration of the church.⁴⁹ Neither are contemporary with the events they describe, the hand dating instead to c.1100. The same tradition appears in a second Bury document, a copy of the *Chronicle* of John of Worcester of mid twelfth-century date, now Oxford, MS Bodley 297, with a substantial amount of local matter interpolated, including an account of the 1020 foundation of monastic regulars at Bury, expanded from that in CCCO 197.⁵⁰ Although CCCO 197 could have been the source for Bodley 297, being earlier, a third instance of the annals occurs in the 'Bury Psalter' (Rome, Vatican Library, Reg. lat. 12), a manuscript written slightly earlier still, at or for Bury in the second quarter of the eleventh century.⁵¹ This manuscript has the two annalistic entries,

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁴⁷ Gransden, 'Legends and traditions'. For her revised opinions see 'Alleged incorruption of the body of St Edmund', p. 134 n. 43 and 'Abbo of Fleury's *Passio sancti Eadmundi*', p. 42 n. 117.

⁴⁸ An edited version is Hervey (ed.), *Corpus Christi College Oxford MS 197*.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3.

⁵⁰ Published in full as Appendix B in Darlington and McGurk (eds and transl.), *Chronicle of John of Worcester*. The annal entries are at p. 643.

⁵¹ The date is derived from palaeographical and art-historical evidence. Temple, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts 900–1066*, pp. 100–2, has argued that it is a Canterbury production, although it may also have been written in Bury, its intended home: Dumville, *English Caroline Script*, p. 93 n. 117. Favouring its Bury origin is a bifolium of c.1050, now Cambridge, Pembroke MS 313, which was found in the binding

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almost identical to those in CCCO 197. Since the Bury Psalter is considerably closer to the events it describes, it shows that the community at Bury looked upon Cnut as their founder certainly from about the mid-eleventh century and perhaps even from the time of the abbey church's consecration in 1032.⁵²

If originating in the mid-eleventh century, the notices cannot be a story stimulated or invented during the subsequent dispute between the abbot of Bury and the bishop of Norwich over the relocation of the East Anglian see which began in the 1070s.⁵³ For David Dumville, however, the notice constitutes little more than a tradition which, he has speculated, was derived from or inspired by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's* mention of the foundation of a minster at *Assandun* in 1020.⁵⁴ We shall return to this potential problem. Denying Bury's record of its Benedictine origins also requires a rejection of the authenticity of shared charter material relating to Bury and Holm St Benet's from Cnut's reign.

The relationship between Bury St Edmund's and St Benet's Abbeys

Two charters attract particular attention for a link between Bury St Edmunds and Holm St Benet's, because they share a near-identical witness list. That to Bury (S 980) is a grant of 1021×1023, of privileges and renders in fish from *Welle* (now Upwell and Outwell, Norfolk), and of eels from Lakenheath, Suffolk. The St Benet's Abbey charter (S 984), also dated 1021×1023, records grants of land to that monastery, in Horning, Ludham and Neatishead, all nearby. Both are in Latin with vernacular versions following. The earliest copies of the Bury charter are a late eleventh-/early twelfth-century version from King's Lynn,⁵⁵ and twelfth-century copies from Cambridge, London and Oxford.⁵⁶ With English and Latin versions, there are some thirty-seven copies of this charter,⁵⁷ which some scholars, such as Florence Harmer, have questioned the authenticity of in its present form.⁵⁸ The St Benet's charter is represented by two copies, the earliest, of thirteenth-century date, being contained within the abbey's register.⁵⁹

of a thirteenth-century ex-Bury manuscript (Cambridge, Pembroke MS 20). The bifolium is written in a hand resembling that of the Bury Psalter: Clemoes, *Manuscripts From Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 15 no. 26. Of course it is possible that if Bury was in receipt of one Canterbury manuscript, it might also have been receiving others before the establishment of its own scriptorium, as Temple has argued: *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts 900–1066*, p. 101. It can be dated earlier than 1095 with some confidence; in that year Edmund's relics were translated to the east end of the new abbey church at Bury, an event which was subsequently 'the only translation recorded in kalendars later than the eleventh century': Dumville, *English Caroline Script*, p. 42 n. 179.

⁵² 'On stylistic evidence the Bury Psalter ought to be assigned to a date not much later than 1030–35': Temple, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts 900–1066*, p. 101.

⁵³ See further Gransden, 'Baldwin, abbot of Bury St Edmunds', esp. at pp. 91–2.

⁵⁴ Dumville, *English Caroline Script*, pp. 38–41.

⁵⁵ King's Lynn Borough Archives KL/C2/61, formerly Ae.34, reproduced in Keynes (ed.), *Facsimiles of Anglo-Saxon Charters*, no. 33 and in Hervey (ed.), *Corolla Sancti Eadmundi*, opposite p. 596.

⁵⁶ Cambridge: University Library, MS Mm.4.19. 85r–87r. London: A later twelfth- to thirteenth-century copy is BL Harley MS 76 138r–139r. Oxford: Bodleian, Bodley MS 297, pp. 353–4.

⁵⁷ Sawyer lists only thirty-two copies but a further five have since been discovered (Electronic Sawyer). All are late copies.

⁵⁸ Harmer (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Writs*, pp. 433–4.

⁵⁹ London, BL Cotton Galba E.ii fol. 30, published in West (ed.), *St Benet of Holme 1020–1210*, i, pp. 1–2.

The two charters demand to be considered together because of their witness lists. Since neither of the charters has a dating clause, their issue can only be ascertained from examination of this witness list, which both share. The outside limits are set by Ælfwine, bishop of Elmham, who succeeded Ælfgar (died Christmas Day 1021),⁶⁰ and Wulfstan, archbishop of York (died 28 May 1023).⁶¹ The other witnesses all fit within these parameters, although Archbishop Æthelnoth of Canterbury was in Rome on 7th October 1022 according to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* 'D',⁶² and Cnut was absent from England for some of the period 1021×1023.⁶³ The witness list therefore points to a date before autumn 1022, when Archbishop Æthelnoth departed for Rome.⁶⁴

Although the charters share witnesses, the two are not identical.⁶⁵ The Bury diploma has thirty-seven witnesses, compared to St Benet's twenty-one, and one of the St Benet's witnesses, Abbot Brihtwig, does not appear in the other list.⁶⁶ There are assorted difficulties with the charters. That to St Benet's is unusual in the grant being made to Christ rather than any human beneficiary, and Archbishop Wulfstan of York signs before Æthelnoth of Canterbury. Similarly, its use of *Huc* for [Earl] Iric appears to be a misreading of an Old English script exemplar. This and the reduced witness list are perhaps unsurprising copying errors, given that the earliest copy of the St Benet's charter appears c.1280 in the house cartulary.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the close correspondence between the lists, with all shared witnesses appearing in exactly the same order, emphasises the link between the two, and the witnesses appear to have been drawn from a genuine list.

Two options present themselves. Either both charters are genuine and were issued at the same time c.1022, or one house used the witness list of a charter belonging to the other. Of the two, the Bury charter has most often been seen as a forgery because it grants privileges to the abbey, including freedom from ever being subject to the bishop of the shire. This in particular smacks of a retrospective claim, generated by the dispute between the abbey and the East Anglian diocesan from the 1070s. Its English version is also so close in structure and phraseology to a charter of Edward the Confessor (S 1046), widely regarded as spurious, that the two must be taken together. Finally, another Bury charter purporting to be of Edward the Confessor, S 1045, specifically records charters of Edmund, Cnut, Harthacnut and Edward. Its purpose therefore seems to have been

⁶⁰ ASC 'D', s.a. 1021: Garmonsway (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, p. 154.

⁶¹ Lapidge *et al.* (eds), *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 495. The St Benet's charter has often been set at 1020×1022 (for instance Sawyer) despite Wulfstan of York appearing as a witness, giving an end-date of 1023. Similarly, Bishop Ælfwine's presence points to a date in 1021 or after.

⁶² Garmonsway (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, pp. 154–6.

⁶³ Hart, *Early Charters of Eastern England*, p. 64.

⁶⁴ Keynes, 'Cnut's earls', p. 49 n. 39.

⁶⁵ *Contra* Hart, *Early Charters of Eastern England*, p. 64. The full transcriptions are available at <http://www.anglo-saxons.net/charters>.

⁶⁶ The identity of this abbot is uncertain. A Brihtwig was probably abbot of Glastonbury from before 1019–24, attesting in a number of charters such as S 955 (of 1019, probably authentic), S 958 (of 1022, possibly authentic) and S 960 (of 1023, authentic): Knowles *et al.*, *Heads of Religious Houses I*, pp. 51, 226 and 298. A Brihtwig also attests as an abbot in S 979, a grant of land by Cnut to Athelney Abbey dated c.1023×1032, which is generally acknowledged as genuine: *Electronic Sawyer*.

⁶⁷ West (ed.), *St Benet of Holme 1020–1210*, i, p. 2 n. 5 and *ibid.* ii, p. 179.

to justify other spurious documents of which one (that of Harthacnut, S 995) is certainly forged.⁶⁸

The implication has been that Bury forged a charter of Cnut using a witness list borrowed from a grant to St Benet's Abbey. A suitable mechanism for this loan has been the belief that the Benedictine community at Bury came from St Benet's.⁶⁹ As we have seen, however, the earliest source for Bury's colonisation comes from a Norwich tract, stating that Bishop Ælfwine appointed a monk of Holm to be the prior of his new cathedral priory at *Beodriceworth*.⁷⁰ The authenticity of the St Benet's charter is therefore of some interest. Despite its imperfect witness list, it may well have a genuine core.⁷¹ The grant claims nothing that was contested later, all land being held by the abbey at Domesday, and while the wording has been noted as unusual, this is not an insuperable problem. Of the thirty-five extant charters of Cnut's reign, eighteen are considered clearly authentic, among which there is a diversity in their formulation. Simon Keynes has suggested this range may reflect a decline in the number of charters issued and the circumstances of their production at this time.⁷² However, the guilt by association with Bury charter S 980, and the fact that the next-oldest surviving charter from St Benet's, S 1055, is certainly spurious,⁷³ makes it possible that S 984 is probably best considered only as based on authentic material. This possibility does not make it certain that the Bury charter borrowed a witness list from St Benet's.

Even if the authenticity of the charters themselves is considered questionable, the fact remains that the common material suggests some relationship between the two abbeys. Gransden has suggested that there is little evidence for any close contact until their arrangement of confraternity, implied in the Customary of St Edmund (c.1234), although the Customary text suggests there was an earlier understanding.⁷⁴ Based on the earliest surviving copy of the shared-witness charters, some contact was in place by the late eleventh or early twelfth century at the latest.

This raises interesting questions because it coincides with the time Bury St Edmunds was in dispute with the East Anglian bishop. As part of its defence against Herfast, the abbey may have chosen to publicise its Benedictine origins as lying with the small community of Holm St Benet's in Norfolk's Broadland. Such a story would have been flattering to St Benet's, which is also presumably what led the author of *Liber Eliensis* to claim Bury's community originated partly from Ely. The choice of St Benet's is rather puzzling though. Bury had some form of institutional history as a *monasterium*, extending back at least to the 950s, whereas St Benet's has no certain history earlier than the 1020s.⁷⁵ St Benet's was

⁶⁸ Harmer (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Writs*, pp. 141 and n. 2 and p. 434.

⁶⁹ Keynes, 'Cnut's earls', p. 48.

⁷⁰ Published in Galbraith, 'East Anglian see', p. 226.

⁷¹ Gransden, 'Legends and traditions', p. 98 unsurprisingly says it may well be a forgery.

⁷² Keynes, 'Cnut's earls', p. 48.

⁷³ Harmer (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Writs*, pp. 426 and 555; Hart, *Early Charters of Eastern England*, pp. 92–4 (who says the charter may be based on original information); Keynes, 'Cnut's earls', p. 49 n. 39.

⁷⁴ Gransden, 'Legends and traditions', p. 97.

⁷⁵ Its house foundation legends are discussed more fully below, pp. 145–6.

always a small foundation when compared to Ely, Bury, Ramsey or Peterborough, and its distance from Bury compared to the Fenland houses made it a curious choice to look to. It may even be possible that Bury's access to a St Benet's charter helped to stimulate such a story. For such a case to be sustained, one has to question the likelihood of Bury having to resort to St Benet's to find a suitable charter to act as an exemplar when several other houses with good archives were far nearer. Similarly, Bury had little to gain by inventing a close relationship with St Benet's, not least because the latter often appears to have acted in concert with the local diocesan in the late eleventh century.⁷⁶ It may be that the origin story only became more widely circulated and adopted at Bury some time after the dispute about the see's location had been settled; this certainly seems to have been true of other assorted traditions of St Edmund.⁷⁷ Once circulating more widely, it may have been easier to accept an origin at St Benet's which coincidentally corroborated Bury's regularisation under Cnut. If the bishop was looking for a Benedictine house from which to suggest Bury owed its first monastic community it would have been most expedient to choose one from within his diocese; and that left the choice of only Holm St Benet's.⁷⁸

This latter point only underlines the fact that a number of arguments remain to support the Holm/Bury link. First, why did Bury not choose to promote an ancient relationship with one of the several Fenland houses, which were not only powerful but outside East Anglia? In particular, if Ramsey had been responsible for Bury's regularisation, it is strange indeed that neither house appear to have had any tradition of a relationship, despite Abbo's authorship of the *Passio sancti Eadmundi*. Second, it is of note that both Bury and St Benet's saw their Benedictine origins as lying under Cnut; at Bury this was certainly by the mid-eleventh century, before the dispute with the East Anglian diocesan began.⁷⁹ Even if the nagging hint of a relationship between Bury and St Benet's based on the charters is treated as uncertain, a wider examination shows the fundamentally East Anglian nature of Bury St Edmunds and the improbability that Ramsey was involved in its Benedictinisation.

The importance of the memorial church at Assandun

Perhaps the most curious strand in the evidence concerning Bury's foundation is the consecration by Cnut of a minster church at a place called *Assandun* in 1020. The event is recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*:

⁷⁶ For instance Bishop Æthelmær (1047–70) founded Rumburgh Priory as a cell of St Benet's with Abbot Thurstan, who ruled until c.1064: Knowles *et al.*, *Heads of Religious Houses I*, p. 67. See also further below, pp. 125–6. Similarly, St Benet's seems to have given up its possession of the church in Yarmouth to the bishop after the Conquest: Chapter 5, pp. 185–7 and n. 132.

⁷⁷ Gransden, 'Legends and traditions'; 'Abbo of Fleury's *Passio sancti Eadmundi*'.

⁷⁸ Gransden, 'Legends and traditions', p. 101.

⁷⁹ The St Benet's house chronicles are all of thirteenth-century date, or later. Only that of John de Oxenedes gives St Benet's foundation date, of 1019: Ellis (ed.), *Chronica Johannis de Oxenedes*, p. 17. See also below, pp. 142–6. In addition to the St Benet's chronicle material printed in Ellis' edition of *Oxenedes*, a further set of annals, argued to have been at Holm in the fifteenth century, has recently been noted by Luxford, 'A forgotten medieval Benedictine manuscript'.

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In this year the King and Earl Thurkil went to *Assandun*, together with Archbishop Wulfstan and other bishops and abbots and many monks, and consecrated a church at *Assandun*.⁸⁰

Assandun church was of significance in marking the site of the battle at which, in 1016, Cnut defeated Edmund Ironside, enabling him to claim the English throne.⁸¹ It was also clearly designed to fulfil an active symbolic role for Cnut, to mediate his own place in Anglo-Saxon society.

Of more immediate concern, *Assandun* was not established as a Benedictine house, although it seems shortly to have been in the hands of one (Ely).⁸² If Cnut's interests at Bury St Edmunds and Holm St Benet's are to be examined, it could be noted that the king showed no obvious desire to install a regularised community at a prestigious personal foundation. Of further importance, as suggested by David Dumville, the notice of *Assandun*'s memorial church in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* may have been used as a model for the annalistic note in the Bury Psalter about the foundation and consecration of Bury St Edmund's Abbey.⁸³ Although the first annal bears little resemblance to the *Chronicle*'s report of the consecration at *Assandun*, the 1032 annal dates the dedication as occurring on 18 October, the anniversary of *Assandun*, a 'striking coincidence heightened by the day of the consecration not being on a Sunday in 1032'.⁸⁴

From this, Dumville has suggested that Æthelwine *amicus dei* was, as Ealdorman of East Anglia, in a position of power to act as protector or even patron of the church containing Edmund's relics. As the founder of Ramsey Abbey, pouring considerable personal resources into its foundation, he or his family may have provided a link between these two houses, reflected in Abbo writing the *Passio Sancti Eadmundi*. For Dumville this 'seems sufficient to open up the possibility that the minster at Bury St Edmunds was reformed in the 970s or 980s'.⁸⁵

This argument appears to overlook a number of facts. The most important is the *prima facie* evidence for dating Bury's Benedictine origin, the annal notices in

⁸⁰ Garmonsway (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, p. 154, taken from 'D'.

⁸¹ The location of *Assandun* has long attracted scholarly debate but thanks to papers by Cyril Hart, 'Site of *Assandun*', and Warwick Rodwell, 'Battle of *Assandun* and its memorial church', the site can be identified almost conclusively with St Botolph's church, Hadstock in Essex. Excavations by Rodwell revealed an impressive Late Anglo-Saxon church beneath the modest medieval building, and radio-carbon dates show it to have been of post-Viking date: Fernie, 'Responds and dating of St Botolph's, Hadstock', p. 72 n. 26. For such an important church to be built in an apparently isolated location, yet near the existing minster church at Ashdon, makes little sense unless it were Cnut's memorial church, marking the actual battle site. A striking parallel was the foundation of Battle Abbey on Senlac Hill by William of Normandy, only fifty years later. For the martial nature of such religious foundations see Hallam, 'Monasteries as war memorials'.

⁸² Land at Hadstock was in the possession of the convent at Ely from the time of Abbot Ælfsige 996×999 – 1012×1016: Knowles *et al.*, *Heads of Religious Houses I*, p. 44; the abbey came to have possession of St Botolph's church (*LE*, ii, 76).

⁸³ Dumville, *English Caroline Script*, p. 40.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 41. The day of consecration is perhaps not so surprising as Dumville has argued. When Ramsey Abbey translated and consecrated the relics of St Ivo on 24 April 1002, it was ten years to the day of the death of their great benefactor Ealdorman Æthelwine *amicus dei*: Lapidge, 'Abbot Germanus, Winchcombe, Ramsey', p. 122. Clearly the anniversary date for a consecration could be more important than simply ensuring it took place on a Sunday.

⁸⁵ Dumville, *English Caroline Script*, pp. 47–8.

the Bury Psalter. The notes were written within only twenty years of the consecration by Cnut of the new abbey church and therefore, one presumes, well within living memory of a number of the monastic community. Regularisation also required monks to be brought from somewhere and, as we have seen, no traditions for this emerge other than from Ely or St Benet's in the post-Conquest period. Finally, the consecration of Bury's abbey church on the sixteenth anniversary of *Assandun* may well have held a wider significance, perhaps to make a connection between Edmund's martyrdom in 869 and Edmund Ironside's defeat in 1016.⁸⁶ This interpretation is certainly the most appealing; the coincidence of two Edmunds being involved is as striking as the date, October 18th. Having already established a memorial church at *Assandun* in 1020, it need occasion no great surprise to find Cnut using Bury as the focus of a similar ceremony with wider symbolic associations. Regularising the clerical community at Bury into a Benedictine abbey also allowed its enhancement in a visibly different way, beyond just granting further endowments to a wealthy institution. It also tied the new abbey personally to Cnut. Finally, the endowment of a Benedictine abbey church at Bury, dedicated to a saint whose name was shared by the king he defeated, echoed the patronage of Edmund's cult by a previous Danish elite a century earlier.

Taken together, these features provide a far more credible basis for the origins of Bury St Edmunds as a Benedictine abbey than a literary commission undertaken by Abbo of Fleury.⁸⁷ Wider contextual evidence reinforces Bury's situation in an East Anglian rather than Fenland/Mercian sphere. This can be seen in a number of ways.

A BENEDICTINE REGIONALISM?

A plot of all Bury St Edmunds' landholdings at the time of the Norman Conquest shows its possessions to have been widespread but fundamentally East Anglian (Fig. 24). Its estates were most dense in West Suffolk where it had its Liberty, but they extended throughout Suffolk, to the coast (at Southwold and Benacre); up the Waveney valley; and well into Norfolk (at Wendling, Marlingford, Caistor by Norwich and Buckenham). By contrast, the abbey's possessions in Essex were limited to Alpamstone, Colne and Wrabness, while in Cambridgeshire it held land only at Soham and March. The documented late eleventh-century county borders thus seem to have acted as more than a jurisdictional boundary, and indeed to have displayed the effective limits of Bury's land tenure. In turn, this

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁸⁷ It should be noted that Dumville's arguments are directed towards fitting Bury St Edmunds into an 'Oswaldian' circle of reform houses, to explain the receipt and use of similar palaeographical script-forms. This view is structured by an assumption that only houses of the same reformist strand would have been influenced by, and used, such identical script types: Dumville, *English Caroline Script*, pp. 145–50. For a critique, see Heslop's review in the *Journal of Theological Studies*, 45 (1994), pp. 378–81.

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must relate back to those members of the secular aristocracy whose gifts of land created and enhanced Bury's endowment.

The landholdings of the other monasteries in 1086 are equally informative.⁸⁸ Holm St Benet's estates were centred in north-east Norfolk, with a sizeable local endowment. Ely stands out as a community with extensive and far-flung estates. In addition to a concentration of possessions in its Liberty in south-east Suffolk, it also had several landholdings in central and western Norfolk. In Cambridgeshire, its lands were generally restricted, albeit not so tightly, to that county's boundaries. Ramsey's estates were concentrated to the south of the abbey, most densely in Huntingdonshire but with a few minor estates in west and north-west Norfolk.⁸⁹

Such a snapshot of landholdings can be misleading because all the monastic houses are known to have lost some lands or possessions before 1066. Indeed, the legal disputes over land – which were an ongoing feature of monastic endowments – attest to some fluidity in land ownership. Nevertheless, the picture from Domesday Book is essentially representative and shows the regional nature of Bury and St Benet's landholdings and, by extension, their patrons.

Wills

The above impression is reinforced by the fragmentary evidence of wills. Of the thirty-nine wills published by Dorothy Whitelock,⁹⁰ twenty-two have an East Anglian interest. The principal reason is the extensive collection of wills held by Bury St Edmund's Abbey, in which various grants of property or gifts made to the community were recorded.⁹¹ The wills show not only the testators' landed interests, but in the context of religious communities, with which houses they particularly identified, to bequeath gifts. All twenty-two wills are listed in Table 2.

Ramsey and Bury feature together as recipients only twice. In his will of c.1042/3, Ælfric Modercope left six marks of silver to Ramsey while giving land to Bury and Ely.⁹² In the second will, of Thurstan, 1043×1045, the estate at the

⁸⁸ 1086 is preferable to 1066 because not all entries are supplied with information *TRE*.

⁸⁹ The latter are of note in the argument over contiguous landholdings indicating a relationship between Bury St Edmunds and Ramsey. In a number of instances, Ely Abbey also had adjacent landholdings. Thus, all three abbeys held land at Hilgay (Norfolk) and Wisbech (Cambs.), while Ramsey and Ely had land at Fordham (Norfolk). For Hilgay, *LDB*, fols 209a, 213a and 215a. For Wisbech *GDB*, fols 192a, 192b and d. For Fordham *LDB*, fols 213a and 215b.

⁹⁰ Whitelock (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*. There are a few other extant Anglo-Saxon wills other than those given by Whitelock. Those of Leofwine, Wulfstan's son (998) and Bishop Ælfwold of Crediton (1008×1012) were published by Napier and Stevenson (eds.), *Crawford Collection of Charters and Documents*, nos ix and x. Those of Æthelnoth, Wulfgar, Æthelwyrd, Gænborg and Badanoth Beotting, and bequests of King Alfred to Shaftesbury and Ceolwin to Winchester, are published in Robertson (ed. and transl.), *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, nos iii, vi, xiii, xvii, xxvi and xxxii. The wills of Reeve Abba (c.835), Earl Alfred (871×889), King Alfred (880×885), Earl Æthelwold (946×955) and King Eadred (951×955) are published in Harmer (ed. and transl.), *Select English Historical Documents*, nos ii, x, xi, xx and xxi. None of these contain any bequest to establishments in the east of England.

⁹¹ The majority are contained in the early fourteenth-century Bury Sacrist's Register, now Cambridge University Library MS Ff. 2. 33.

⁹² Whitelock (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, pp. 74–5 and 185–6. The will is also printed by Thorpe (ed.), *Diplomatarium Anglicum*, pp. 566–7.

Table 2. Anglo-Saxon wills with an East Anglian interest, with recipients of bequests

<i>Whitelock will no.</i>	<i>Testator</i>	<i>Will date</i>	<i>Bequests to</i>
1.	Bishop Theodred	942×951	Bury, Hoxne, St Paul's, Mendham
2. cf. 14 and 15	Ælfgar	946×951	Bury, (Stoke by Nayland), (Barking), (CCCCanterbury), [St Pauls]
13.	Ælfhelm	975×1016	Ely, St Peter's, [Ramsey]
14.	Æthelflæd of Damerham	962×991, prob. 975×991	(Bury), CCCCanterbury, Glastonbury, (Mersea), (Barking), (St Paul's), (Stoke by Nayland)
15.	Ælflæd*	?1000×1002	Bury, Ely, Stoke by Nayland, Mersea, CCCCanterbury*, St Paul's*, Barking*, (Sudbury)
16.	Æthelric	pre-995	Bury ½, Sudbury ½, St Paul's, (CCCCanterbury)
20.	Ætheling Æthelstan	c.1015	CCCCanterbury, Nunnaminster, New Minster, [Shaftesbury], [Ely], Refers to 'land in East Anglia'
24.	Thurketel of Palgrave	?pre-1038	Bury
25	Thurketel Heyng	1st ½ C11	Bury, St Benet's
26.	Bishop Ælfric	1035/37×1040	Bury, St Benet's, Hoxne, Elmham, (?St Peter's)
27.	Wulfsgie	1022×1043	Bury
28.	Ælfric Moderscope	c.1042/43	Bury, St Benet's, Ely, [Ramsey]
29.	Leofgifu	1035×1044	Bury, [Colne]
31.	Thurstan	1043×1045	Bury, St Benet's ½, Ely, Ramsey ½, CCCCanterbury, (Barking)
32. cf. 33 and 34	Wulfgyth	1046	[Bury], [Ely], [St Osyth's], [CCCCanterbury], [St Augustine's]
33.	Edwin	alive in 1066	Bury, St Benet's, Ely
34.	Ketel	1052×1066	(Bury), (St Benet's), CCCCanterbury
35.	Bishop Æthelmær	1047×1070	Bury
36.	Thurkil and Æthelgyth	?pre-1066	Bury
37.	Siflæd	? C10/11	Bury
38.	Siflæd	? C10/11	Bury
39.	Ulf and Madselin	1066×1068	Peterborough, Crowland, Ramsey, (Thorney)

Notes: () grant of land by reversion or if a named beneficiary dies

[] not actual land grant; rent or a possession (e.g. a mill), or payment

* previous ancestors had bequeathed property to the same house

CC Christ Church

½ indicates an estate halved and shared between the two beneficiaries named

middle hall at Shouldham was to be shared between Holm St Benet's and Ramsey.⁹³ By contrast, St Benet's (never so popular as Bury) appears in six wills alongside Bury, in all cases being granted land. This preference is not reducible to the testators coming exclusively from the East Anglian heartlands where they had only two Benedictine houses to patronise. Bury in particular was a large house and should have been in a position to attract benefactions from a far wider area. That this happened on occasion is confirmed by the will of Wulfgyth, of 1046, which made bequests to Ely and Bury, but also to Christ Church and St Augustine's, Canterbury, and to St Osyth's in Essex.⁹⁴

More usually, testators appear to have restricted themselves to making bequests to houses local to their own estates. An example is the will of Ulf and Madselin, 1066×1068, which concentrates on the Fenland houses. Nevertheless, even this will reveals that certain houses were seen as more appropriate to leave land to than others; the will includes gifts to Peterborough, Crowland, Ramsey and Thorney but omits any mention of either Ely or Bury.⁹⁵ The limited available evidence does not seem to show testators favouring only Benedictine houses. Æthelflæd of Damerham's will, probably 975×991, makes bequests to Glastonbury and Christ Church, Canterbury, to St Paul's (to become episcopal property), to Bury and to the minsters at West Mersea (Essex) and Stoke-by-Nayland, Suffolk.⁹⁶ If it seems strange that individuals making wills in the Fenland or East Midland areas did not recognise Bury in their last bequests this appears to be a genuine eschewal rather than a distortion of the historical record; any bequests to Bury would have been recorded alongside those other wills favouring the abbey. Instead, the wills attest that patronage of Benedictine monasteries by East Anglian testators focused upon those houses within the historical kingdom. In those instances where other houses were patronised, they were either of national importance (like Christ Church, Canterbury) or, interestingly, in Essex (Mersea, Barking). Houses in the Mercian area of the Fens appear to have been almost studiously avoided.

The occurrence of Ely, St Benet's and Bury St Edmunds together may be seen in other ways, for instance their subsequent sharing of chronicle material, which demonstrates links between the communities.⁹⁷ More important is the frequency of their appearance together in legal documents. For instance when an agreement was made between Ufi, abbot of Bury, and Bishop Æthelmær over a land transaction (c.1043/44), the sole abbots acting as witnesses were those of Ely and St Benet's.⁹⁸ This relationship continued into the post-Conquest period; a charter of 1075/6×1081/2 securing Ely's privileges was the result of a meeting at which various abbots were present. Those of Chertsey and Crowland represented other 'Æthelwoldian' houses and again the abbots of Bury St Edmunds and St Benet's appeared. Absent were the abbots of nearby Ramsey, Thorney and Peterborough,

⁹³ Whitelock (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, pp. 80–1 and 192–7.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 84–6 and 197–9.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 94–7 and 207–12.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 34–7 and 137–41.

⁹⁷ Gransden, 'Chronica Buriensis', p. 244.

⁹⁸ Robertson (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, no. xcvi.

despite the latter two also being 'Æthelwoldian' houses and geographically close.⁹⁹

Such later evidence cannot, of course, prove that there was no institutional link between the communities at Bury St Edmunds and Ramsey in the tenth century. The evidence is, though, insistent that by the eleventh century Bury operated within a clear regional context to be identified with the historical kingdom of East Anglia, in which Ely – by now in the diocese of Dorchester – was at times included. Bury saw its own Benedictine origins lying very clearly with Holm St Benet's under King Cnut's patronage, and an East Anglian focus is apparent in the bequests by secular patrons. It would be unwise to pursue a case for radical regionalism in tenth- and eleventh-century East Anglia too far but it is certainly true that Norfolk and Suffolk preserved many organisational and tenurial systems at variance with other regions at Domesday.¹⁰⁰ The ongoing patronage of Benedictine monasticism in the East of England appears to reiterate the divide between East Anglian and East Midland foundations. Five subsequent monastic foundations reinforce this pattern: Chatteris in Cambridgeshire, St Ives and St Neots in Huntingdonshire, Clare and Rumburgh in Suffolk. A sixth possible foundation was in Thetford, Norfolk.

St Neots

The history of St Neots is outlined in some detail elsewhere.¹⁰¹ At the dedication ceremony of Ely Abbey in 974, Bishop Æthelwold discussed plans for a new foundation at Eynesbury in Huntingdonshire with Abbot Byrhtnoth, the layman Leofric and his wife Leofflæd.¹⁰² The priory's foundation charter, now lost but summarised in the *Liber Eliensis* account (ii, 29) dates the establishment to 975×984.¹⁰³ Eynesbury was to become better known as St Neots after its Cornish patron saint, whose relics arrived at an uncertain date, but apparently some time before 1013.¹⁰⁴

The location of this new community with which Æthelwold was involved was in an area of eastern Mercia. The extent to which this was the benefactors' choice is complicated by the obscurity of their origins. An East Anglian landowner Leofric, with estates at Brandon and Stretham in Cambridgeshire near Ely, is known from *Libellus Æthelwoldi* to have sold Æthelwold an estate of twelve

⁹⁹ Bates (ed.), *Regesta Regum*, no. 118.

¹⁰⁰ Williamson, *Origins of Norfolk*, p. 162.

¹⁰¹ Gorham, *History and Antiquities of Eynesbury*; Doble, *St Neot: Patron of St Neot Cornwall*; Chibnall, 'History of the priory of St Neots'; Dumville and Lapidge (eds), *Annals of St Neots*; Tebbutt, 'St Neot's Priory'.

¹⁰² Hart has suggested that this Leofric should be identified as the son of Ealdorman Æthelwold and nephew of Æthelwine, Ealdorman of East Anglia who signed the priory foundation charter (*LE*, ii, 29) on the basis of the 'B' text of *Chronicon Abbatiae Ramesiensis*, read in preference to the 'A' version: Hart, 'Æthelstan Half-king', p. 589 and n. 74.

¹⁰³ Æscwig was bishop of Dorchester (in whose diocese the site lay) 975×979 to 1002; Bishop Æthelwold died in 984.

¹⁰⁴ The relics appear then in a list of saints and the locations of their relics, later copied into another work, the *Secgan be þam Godes sanctum þe on Englende ærost reston*: Rollason, 'List of saints' resting places', p. 61.

hides at Linden End (Cambs.) and invited the bishop to dedicate his church at Brandon.¹⁰⁵ However, this Leofric's wife is recorded consistently in the *Libellus* as Æthelflæd; for the identification to be correct, a scribal error must have occurred equally consistently in transcription, with Leofflæd being written for Æthelflæd.¹⁰⁶ Leofric was a common name and more probably a different individual is indicated. Ealdorman Æthelwine also has a shadowy presence. The twelfth-century *Chronicon abbatiae Rameseiensis* refers to the dedication of Ramsey in 991 and mentions the monasteries under his patronage including the *monasterium de Enolfbiri quod nunc Sancti Neoti dicitur*.¹⁰⁷ It was perhaps the wane in fortunes of Æthelwine's family after his death that accounts for the subsequent destruction of St Neots.

The initial endowment included two hides in Eynesbury itself, six at Waresley (Hunts.) and nine in Gamlingay (Cambs.), but by 1086 these estates had become dissipated. The land in Eynesbury appears to have been absorbed into Robert FitzWimarc's fifteen-hide holding in Domesday, as may have been the six hides into the seven he held in Waresley.¹⁰⁸ The Gamlingay estate was presumably part of Eudo FitzHerbert's eighteen-hide holding in 1086.¹⁰⁹ The need for powerful patronage seems also to be illustrated by the fate of St Neots' relics. The *Secgan* shows they were still at Eynesbury before 1013, but by c.1115 they were claimed by Crowland when Orderic Vitalis visited. He related that a former abbot of Crowland, Osketil, had removed them in collaboration with his sister, Leofgifu, on whose estate Eynesbury lay, because 'insufficient reverence was shown there to this great man'.¹¹⁰ St Neots' claims for their continued ownership of the relics were supported by St Anselm, writing c.1080.¹¹¹ Safety from renewed Viking attacks has been suggested for the relocation,¹¹² but familial involvement is a more credible mechanism, Leofgifu perhaps being the heiress to Leofric and Leofflæd's estate. Except in Ely's initial involvement, supplying half the monks for the new foundation at Eynesbury (Thorney supplying the rest), and in retaining a copy of the foundation grant on Æthelwold's behalf, St Neots is never seen in anything other than an East Midland context; even the contested possession of St Neots' relics occurred with a Mercian house.

St Ives and Chatteris

If a relationship with Bury is questionable, two more certain dependencies of Ramsey were St Ives and Chatteris. The foundation date for St Ives is not precise, but appears to have been undertaken in the time of Ramsey's second abbot, Eadnoth (993–c.1007).¹¹³ Ivo's relics were translated to Ramsey and consecrated

¹⁰⁵ Keynes and Kennedy (eds and transl.), *Book of Bishop Æthelwold*, §6 and 7.

¹⁰⁶ Dumville and Lapidge (eds), *Annals of St Neots*, pp. lxxxviii–lxxxix.

¹⁰⁷ Macray (ed.), *Chronicon Abbatiae Rameseiensis*, i, p. 96.

¹⁰⁸ *GDB*, fols 207b and 205d respectively.

¹⁰⁹ *GDB*, fol. 197d.

¹¹⁰ Chibnall (ed.), *Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, ii, pp. 342–3.

¹¹¹ Schmitt (ed.), *Sancti Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi*, iii, Ep. 473.

¹¹² Blake (ed.), *Liber Eliensis*, p. 420.

¹¹³ Knowles *et al.*, *Heads of Religious Houses I*, pp. 61 and 253.

on 24 April 1002.¹¹⁴ Eadnoth's involvement in the foundation was central since the land upon which the priory was founded (consisting of twenty hides at Slepe, and land and churches at Elsworth and Knapwell, Cambs.) was all left to Ramsey Abbey by members of Eadnoth's family.¹¹⁵ Unlike St Neots, the house managed to survive until the Conquest, although the landholdings were assessed under Ramsey in Domesday Book. Their ownership of estates in the East Midlands must have led to the selection of the location for this Ramsey satellite. A similar arrangement appears to be behind the foundation of the nunnery at Chatteris in Cambridgeshire, c.1007×1016. Eadnoth created the foundation, perhaps c.1007 while abbot of Ramsey, on familial land, using other family estates at Over (Cambs.) and Barley (Herts.), for its endowment.¹¹⁶

Once again, a feature of the foundations at Chatteris and St Ives is the strong familial tie, more reminiscent of Middle Anglo-Saxon religious patronage than reformed Benedictinism. Eadnoth, who became the second abbot of Ramsey, was son of Æthelstan Mannessune, an important co-founder of that monastery. Eadnoth's grants of land for the creation of St Ives and Chatteris, and the appointment of his sister Ælfwyn as first abbess of the latter,¹¹⁷ all display a somewhat dynastic element. Reflecting these landholding interests, Ramsey and its subsequent satellites all look to areas within the diocese of Dorchester (whose bishop Eadnoth became) – never east to the historical kingdom of East Anglia.

Clare, Rumburgh and Thetford

In contrast to the foregoing peripheral foundations, only two other definite pre-Conquest Benedictine monasteries were founded within East Anglia, at Rumburgh, a cell of Holm St Benet's, and at Clare in Suffolk, a cell of Bury St Edmunds. Claims have also been made for another former cell of Bury St Edmunds at Thetford.

To take the last first. The evidence for Thetford is spurious at best, resting on the authority of William Camden in his *Britannia* and on the Norfolk antiquarian Francis Blomefield.¹¹⁸ Blomefield stated that a monastery was founded by Ufi,

¹¹⁴ Lapidge, 'Abbot Germanus, Winchcombe, Ramsey', p. 122. 24 April is the date that is marked for Ivo's translation in post-Conquest calendars of Crowland and Ely: Wormald, *English Benedictine Kalendars after 1100*, i, p. 120 and ii, p. 11 respectively. Interestingly, a mid-eleventh-century Crowland kalendar, Oxford Bodleian MS Douce 296, omits Ivo but includes the Ely saints Werburgh (3 February), Eormenild (13 February) and Æthelthryth (23 June), as well as Felix (8 March), Botolph (17 June) and Edmund (20 November): Wormald, *English Kalendars before 1100*, pp. 253–65. This suggests if not an East Anglian interest on the part of Crowland, then at least influence from its fellow Æthelwoldian house of Ely. It also manifestly ignores Ramsey.

¹¹⁵ Hart, 'Eadnoth I of Ramsey', p. 618.

¹¹⁶ The date of Chatteris is perhaps provided by the foundation being made before Eadnoth became bishop of Dorchester. He attested a charter granting land to St Albans Abbey in 1007 still as abbot of Ramsey (S 916, authentic) while he first occurs as a bishop in 1012 witnessing a charter to the bishop of Rochester (S 926, authentic). Chatteris Abbey cannot have been established before 1007 as the foundation endowment of estates at Over and Barley had been left to Ramsey by Ælfwaru, probably Eadnoth's sister, who died in 1007: Hart, 'Eadnoth I of Ramsey', pp. 615–18. The foundation date may more sensibly be expanded to 1016, the year of Eadnoth's death at the battle of Assandun.

¹¹⁷ LE, ii, 71.

¹¹⁸ Gough (ed.), *William Camden's Britannia*; Blomefield and Parkin, *Essay Towards a Topographical History of Norfolk*, ii, p. 89.

first abbot of Bury, in Cnut's reign (1016–35) 'in memory of the English and Danes that were slain not far off, in the great battle between King Edmund and the Danish captains, Ingwær and Ubba'. The community is said to have been 'placed just by the church of St George, which Cnut had given to his abbey at Bury but upon that land that Earl Turkil [Thurketyl] gave to that monastery'.¹¹⁹ The monks are said to have officiated in the church until c.1176 when their possessions were resigned to the abbot who used the endowment to support a community of nuns then living by the chapel of St Edmund at Lyng, moving them into Thetford.¹²⁰

Cyril Hart has suggested that 'there is no need to doubt [the] basic reliability' of Camden and Blomefield's sources, citing Bury's ownership of a church in Thetford at Domesday.¹²¹ On the contrary, the whole account is difficult to accept so simply. The dedication of the church held by Bury in Domesday Book is not recorded, and it would be unwise to state categorically that it was St George's. Indeed, Domesday Book records the ownership of twelve and a half churches in Thetford by 1086, four or five of which were held by Ely Abbey.¹²² The story retailed by Blomefield smacks more of a confused antiquarian invention. Hart has tried to accommodate the story by associating the building of a memorial church here by Cnut as akin to his actions at *Assandun* in 1020, with the story of the battle being inspired by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's* account of Edmund's death. These conflations are enough to warn against any special pleading. If there is any factual basis, it may be that some form of communal life at a church which Bury owned, was subsequently used as an endowment for the nunnery of St George. It does not provide convincing evidence for a pre-Conquest monastic cell.

By contrast, Rumburgh Priory is more securely placed. It appears to have been founded by the East Anglian diocesan, Bishop Æthelmær (1047–70), as a dependency of St Benet's Abbey sometime during the abbacy of St Benet's' second incumbent, Thurstan de Ludham who died in 1064.¹²³ Thurstan was buried before the altar of St Michael in St Benet's abbey church and a personal devotion to this saint may be the reason for Rumburgh's joint dedication to SS Michael and Felix; it would reflect both his interest and probably the bishop's choice of Felix, the first East Anglian diocesan. The late thirteenth-century *Register of St Benet's* records the monk Blakere being established at the cell 1047×1064.¹²⁴ The hand of the bishop appears throughout; each new prior of the cell, appointed by the abbot of St Benet's, was presented to the bishop even though the priory was not a benefice, while the priory's location was closely associated with

¹¹⁹ Blomefield and Parkin, *Essay Towards a Topographical History of Norfolk*, ii, p. 89.

¹²⁰ This is based on the foundation of Thetford St George's nunnery being 1176. In fact the date is less clear and probably best considered by the bracket 1163×1180: Thompson, *Women Religious*, p. 230.

¹²¹ Hart, 'Æthelstan Half-king', p. 599; *LDB* fol. 119a.

¹²² One of these is possibly erroneous. Within the lands of Bishop Stigand, held for the king by William de Noyers, are listed two churches, one dedicated to St Helen: *LDB*, fol. 136a. The *Inquisitio Eliensis*, a collection of material relating to Ely Abbey's holdings in eastern England compiled soon after 1086, claims this land had been held by Stigand from the abbey. It records only one church, St Helen's. Domesday Book's extra church may, therefore, be scribal error, making the true Domesday Book record as eleven and a half churches in Thetford. See Brown (ed.), *Domesday Book Norfolk*, notes 1:210.

¹²³ Ellis (ed.), *Chronica Johannis de Oxenides*, p. 293; Knowles et al., *Heads of Religious Houses I*, p. 67.

¹²⁴ West (ed.), *St Benet of Holme 1020–1210*, i, no. 159.

Landscapes of Monastic Foundation

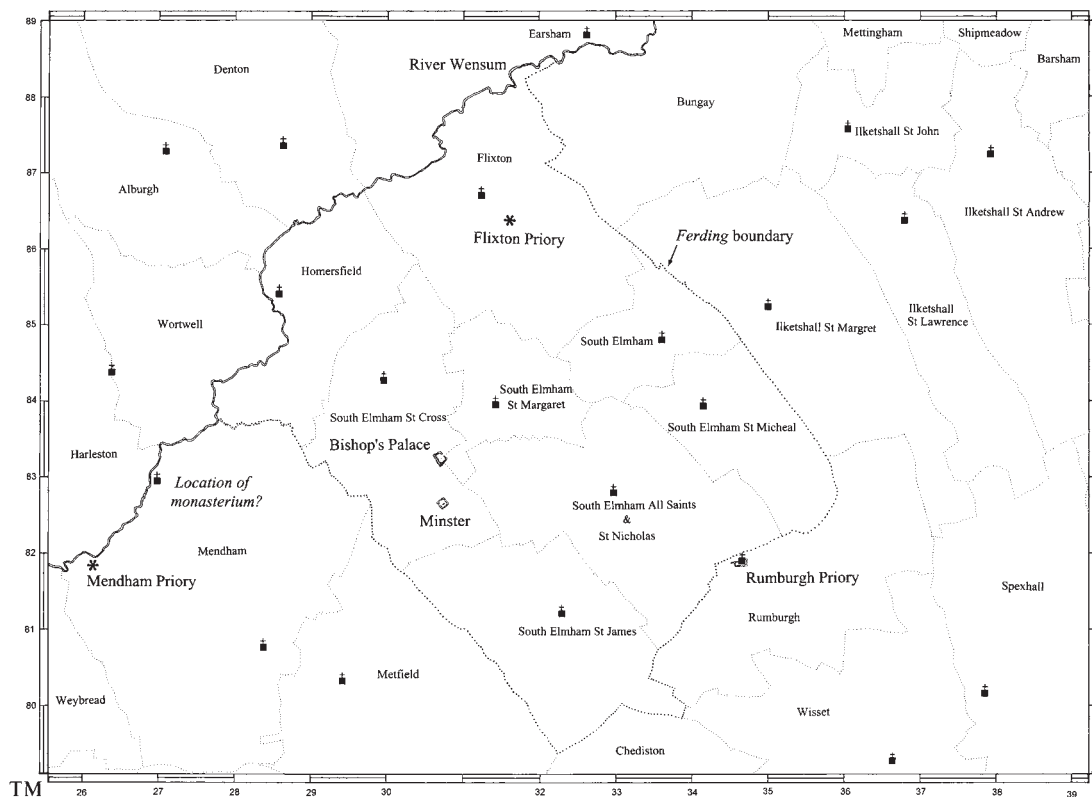


Fig. 25. The boundary of South Elmham *ferding*, Suffolk, and its surrounding parishes.

episcopal land.¹²⁵ Rumburgh parish lies immediately to the south of the bishop's *ferding* of South Elmham, a relationship emphasised still further by the cell being only 150m from the present-day parish and *ferding* boundary (Fig. 25). This proximity is probably related to the scale of the bishop's landholdings. In Suffolk these were circumscribed by Bury's estates (in whose Liberty the bishop held nothing) and Ely (where very little was held). Instead, episcopal property was concentrated in older estates at Hoxne and South Elmham. The prime motive for Rumburgh's foundation as a cell of St Benet's may well have been rooted in concepts of prestige and influence over a Benedictine monastic house. The site of Rumburgh is otherwise unusual and archaeologically atypical in the context of the pre-Conquest monastic foundations of East Anglia, as we shall see.

The second Benedictine cell in the region was at Clare in south-west Suffolk. Our knowledge of the house is again sketchy, and best attested by an extensive entry in Domesday Book.¹²⁶ This account describes how Ælfric, the son of Wihtgar, established a community at the church of St John the Baptist under the priest Ledmer, granting them the manor of Clare as an endowment by charter

¹²⁵ *VCH Suffolk*, ii, p. 78.

¹²⁶ *LDB*, fol. 389b.

Monastic reform in the Later Anglo-Saxon period

(valued at £40 in 1066).¹²⁷ The community was then placed under the custody of Abbot Leofstan of Bury.¹²⁸ Benedictine practice is implied by the comment that the clerics were unable to grant or alienate land from St John, suggesting a communal endowment rather than prebends. After the Conquest, the king took possession of the church and Bury thereafter lost the cell, the land appearing at Domesday among the possessions of Gilbert de Clare. Clare subsequently became Gilbert's *caput* and a religious community was established as a cell of Bec, c.1090. Memory of the cell was preserved at Bury within the list of benefactors, copied into several cartularies.¹²⁹ That the cell should have been founded within the Liberty of St Edmunds is unsurprising, but the location of Clare, on the county border between Suffolk (and the Liberty) and Essex, is probably more than mere coincidence, perhaps acting as a boundary marker of Bury's spiritual authority.¹³⁰

THE POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS GEOGRAPHY: THE LOCATION OF REFORMED HOUSES IN EASTERN ENGLAND

If we accept the dating advanced for the principal Benedictine monasteries in Eastern England,¹³¹ two aspects are particularly striking. First, those houses founded c.970 (Crowland, Ely, Peterborough, Ramsey and Thorney) cluster compared to those made c.1020 (Holm St Benet's and Bury St Edmunds). Second is the sheer quantity of land settled upon these religious communities in a short space of time. Both aspects have implications for understanding the nature of political control in this area in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Most clearly, the establishment of the Fenland monasteries is consonant with the suggestion that West Saxon patronage of Benedictinism related to a royal policy of unification as well as spiritual renewal.¹³² The location of the monasteries founded after c.970 suggests the extension of this policy was, however, quite constrained. In particular, the reform houses lack a comprehensive distribution, in contrast to Wessex where they were more evenly dispersed. The political difficulties in sweeping away established Mercian *monasteria*, many of which had royal origins, may well have been too problematic: if Edgar had had difficulties removing clerics from Winchester in the heart of Wessex, such a scheme was probably too

¹²⁷ Ælfric was a kinsman of Leofgifu, who had bequeathed to him her estate at Bramford near Ipswich, in a will of 1035×1044: Whitelock (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, no. 29. In fact, this estate was in the king's possession in 1066, Roger the sheriff claiming in 1086 that 100 acres and 5 villeins attached to St Peter's church in Ipswich belonged to the manor of Bramford; these were part of a massive 6 carucate (720 acres) holding attached to the church which were owned in 1066 by Ælfric's son Wihtgar: *LDB*, fols 392b–393a.

¹²⁸ The second abbot of Bury, ruled 1044–65: Knowles *et al.*, *Heads of Religious Houses I*, p. 32. His abbacy provides the earliest dating parameter for the foundation.

¹²⁹ Hart, *Early Charters of Eastern England*, no. 110 and p. 248.

¹³⁰ Perhaps unsurprisingly given its short existence, nothing is known archaeologically of this community.

¹³¹ That is, disregarding their satellite foundations such as Rumburgh, St Ives and St Neots.

¹³² Banton, 'Monastic reform and the unification'.

sensitive to attempt across Mercia. The use of land at the margins of that kingdom may have been easier.

We may see the practice of foundation in these areas on two levels. First, conceptually, borders were frequently areas where statements claiming territorial possession were most effectively articulated. The location of the reformed Benedictine monasteries at the edges of Mercian territory provided a highly visible and symbolic presence in which they 'contained' Edgar's unified kingdoms. In alienating landholdings into the ostensibly neutral hands of the Church, directly answerable to the king, they helped secure for the West Saxon crown the borders of the kingdom under institutions loyal to Edgar. Second, using such border areas to provide the endowment for these new monasteries ran a reduced risk of political reaction. The monastic reform movement depended on the enthusiasm, co-operation and protection of the king. However, against a likely background of antagonism or tension with Mercian landowners, it must have considerably helped Oswald and Æthelwold to have a sympathetic local potentate, to ease the task of ensuring or enforcing land sales in the Fens. Notably, this region overlapped with the powerbase of 'Æthelstan Half-king' and his son, Ealdorman Æthelwine, *amicus dei*, who were such staunch sponsors of the reform movement and who so generously endowed Ramsey Abbey.¹³³

The concentration of Æthelwoldian foundations in the Fens – at Ely, Peterborough and Thorney – and Oswaldian houses in the west – at Evesham, Pershore, Winchcombe and Worcester – adds a further layer of spheres of influence developing as part of this more general process of providing endowments. If the intention to found monasteries in areas peripheral to the Mercian heartlands was intended to reduce political tension it was only partially effective, as was shown by the 'anti-monastic' reaction led by Ealdorman Ælfhere of Mercia on Edgar's death in 975.¹³⁴ However, their location also potentially informs us about the position of East Anglia in the process of political unification, and the perceived borders of the kingdom.

Defining territorial boundaries in the Anglo-Saxon period is fraught with difficulties because borders appear to have been as fluid as the power exerted by rival kingdoms, which ebbed and flowed. At the same time, there is a widespread recognition by archaeologists and landscape historians that boundaries often had great longevity, not just within the Anglo-Saxon era but stretching between still wider periods. The difficulty for understanding the Fens, East Anglia, and Mercia, and their political relationships in the tenth century, is knowing what areas were under whose control, and how these might have been marked. For the Middle Anglo-Saxon period, the *Tribal Hidage* reveals numerous small tribal groupings along the eastern fringes of Mercia that complements the impression provided by Bede who described Ely as a *regio* of about 600 hides (Fig. 4).¹³⁵

¹³³ Hart, 'Æthelstan Half-king', pp. 576–7.

¹³⁴ Fisher, 'Anti-monastic reaction'; Williams, '*princeps Merciorum gentis*', pp. 159–70.

¹³⁵ *HE*, iv, 19. Debate about the Tribal Hidage and its origin still rages. See Dumville, 'Tribal Hidage: an introduction'; Davies and Vierck, 'Contexts of Tribal Hidage'; Keynes, 'England 700–900', pp. 21–5; Rumble, 'An edition and translation'; Hart, 'Tribal Hidage'. For an older view, that the Tribal Hidage represents a Mercian revision of a Kentish document, see Russell, 'Tribal Hidage'.

Monastic reform in the Later Anglo-Saxon period

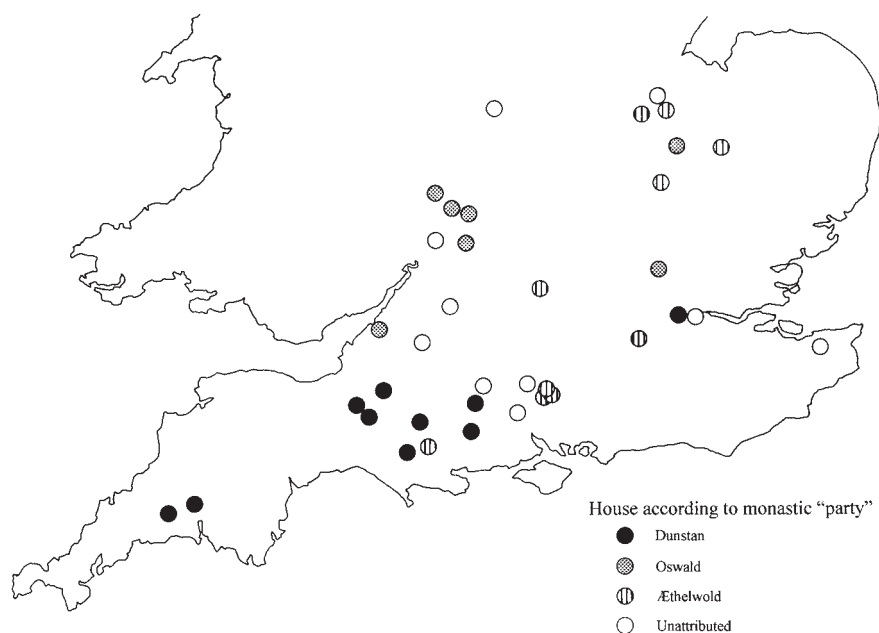


Fig. 26. Tenth-century Benedictine monasteries, showing their founder allegiance.

These various small *regiones* listed in the *Tribal Hidage* may well have been the Middle Anglian area, control of which was historically contested between the Mercian and East Anglian kingdoms. As we have seen, in this context, Ely's foundation in the seventh century may be understood as a border outpost and a symbolic statement of presence by the East Anglian royal family.¹³⁶ The same political situation need not have obtained by the second half of the tenth century; Ely was always on the borders of Mercia and by this time it may have lain in a fundamentally Mercian political sphere of influence. Probably the best indication of this is Ely's presence within the diocese of Dorchester by 970.¹³⁷ Some caution is necessary in attaching perhaps undue significance to the boundaries of episcopal jurisdiction, but their significance in relation to political borders was always strong.¹³⁸ The foundations made under Edgar therefore had a strong political rationale, alienating landholdings and providing a buffer area facing outside the newly unified two core kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia. It is perhaps not without significance that the other clustering of Benedictine monasteries, undertaken principally by Bishop Oswald in the west of Mercia, lay within the Middle Anglo-Saxon kingdom of the Hwicce (Fig. 26). The boundaries of the Hwiccean kingdom appear to have been determined by the ninth century, by which time it was under Mercian domination.¹³⁹ Even to the end of that century land grants in

¹³⁶ See Chapter 2, pp. 55–6.

¹³⁷ The see was transferred to Lincoln in 1075. The diocese of Ely was only established in 1108.

¹³⁸ Stafford, *Unification and Conquest*, pp. 181–3.

¹³⁹ Hooke, *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape The Kingdom of the Hwicce*, pp. 12–20; Bassett, 'In search of the origins', pp. 6–17.

this *provincia* were subject to strict leasing arrangements by the Mercian kings, but by the tenth century many estates had been given to Worcester and the other reform houses. Indeed, Byrthferth of Ramsey's *Vita Sancti Oswaldi*, composed 997×1005, refers to Oswald founding seven monasteries in *Wiccia*, by which is meant the diocese of Worcester.¹⁴⁰

Edgar's policy perhaps informs us more generally about the position of East Anglia in the process of political unification. In addition to northern England, untouched by Benedictine foundations, East Anglia had no reformed houses except Ely, which by now probably existed in a Mercian political sphere. At Bury St Edmunds, the case for a Ramsey-inspired regularisation is flimsy and even if any sway was ever held, this had been very quickly forgotten, with no trace of any tie remaining. Tracing Bury St Edmunds' origins is no academic parlour-game: it was exactly the powerful sort of house that would have been an eminently agreeable target for regularisation by Edgar and his reformist henchmen.

If this fundamentally important East Anglian house was not reformed, what might this say about the wider political context of Edgar's rule? The turmoil in Mercia and beyond after his death demonstrates the underlying tensions present during the period of the initial Benedictine foundations. In this context, enforcing the conversion of a powerful *monasterium*, which had acted, and perhaps continued to act, as a focus for a third kingdom's population and identity, may have been too ambitious. Ely, by contrast, was in a slightly different position. The house was historically linked with East Anglia but both its geographical position on the marches of the old kingdom, and its less emotively nationalistic relics, may have enabled it to be subjugated and reformed more easily, aided by its position under the episcopal control of Dorchester. The East Anglian see, by contrast, included a few parishes of Cambridgeshire but, as later seen in Domesday Book, was fundamentally restricted to the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk; in turn this may well reflect the Late Anglo-Saxon boundary of the East Anglian kingdom. It is therefore interesting to observe how Ely maintained strong links with its historical 'home', through the sharing of chronicle material, in legal witnessing and, crucially, in the minds of testators.¹⁴¹

Clearly, East Anglia had yet to be absorbed by the West Saxon crown. While the king had control over the region through overlordship, its cultural and political identity were, arguably, still strong and potentially volatile. The political and cultural significance of Edmund's relics could only reinforce this and the emphasis on Edmund's celibacy must have been a highly desirable feature for the West Saxon kings to stress, denying any legitimate heir of the Wuffinga line.¹⁴² Under Cnut, a new set of political realities emerged. Not only had another forty

¹⁴⁰ *Vita Sancti Oswaldi* §4; Raine (ed.), *The Historians of the Church of York*, pp. 399–475. On the dating see Lapidge, 'Byrthferth and the *Vita S. Ecgwini*', p. 333. Lapidge gives a tighter dating, to 997×1005, in 'The Hermeneutic style', p. 91. Oswald founded five, not seven, monasteries in *Wiccia*, namely Evesham, Pershore, Westbury-on-Trym, Winchcombe and Worcester.

¹⁴¹ Although it would push the case too far to see Ely as some kind of an East Anglian Sudetenland, there are numerous parallels for cultural groups being contained within rival or alternative controlling political units. This serves only as a reminder of how the testators of wills might have envisioned such cultural links being maintained within the context of their religious patronage.

¹⁴² Hines, 'Anglo-Saxon archaeology of the Cambridgeshire region', p. 135.

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years passed for the West Saxon crown to have increased its fiscal and administrative grip on England; Cnut's rule was based on total overlordship of the country. Politically, the regularisation of an institution like Bury St Edmunds had much to commend it. Unlike Edgar, Cnut's Danish nationality may also have provided a better platform for his intervention in East Anglian politics, with a likely Anglo-Danish elite.¹⁴³ The parallels between St Edmund's death and the defeat of Edmund Ironside would not have been lost upon the population, and the foundation of Benedictine communities at Bury and Holm St Benet's would have done much to display his aspirations not simply to being a good Christian ruler but bringing monastic life to an otherwise untouched area of the country. This expansion of Benedictinism was to continue, until by 1066 only the north of England remained untouched, representing 'the last bulwark of Anglo-Saxon monasticism'.¹⁴⁴

THE PHYSICAL SETTING OF THE REFORMED HOUSES

If the regional location of tenth-century Benedictine houses demonstrates a political dimension, the spiritual aspects of the reform movement might be expected to show similar attention to the specific siting of communities. The most obvious concern was the reuse of pre-existing religious sites by Benedictine monks. This process is certain in three cases: Ely was the site of Æthelthryth's *monasterium*, Peterborough was the ancient *Medeshamstede* founded c.655/6 and Crowland had once been the retreat of Guthlac, a saintly hermit. Ramsey and Thorney, however, have little early evidence. What conditions might the reformers have desired when selecting sites for their new communities?

At Ely and Peterborough, the ancient religious status of the sites must have been motive enough for establishing reformed houses. There is Migration-period evidence for settlement at both, Ely having a host of stray Anglo-Saxon findspots recorded across the Isle, including two sixth-century cemeteries.¹⁴⁵ At Peterborough, an important Roman centre was reused by *romanitas*-conscious Anglo-Saxons, occupation being attested by a cemetery and other stray-finds, including, from the cathedral close, a seventh-century blue glass palm cup.¹⁴⁶ Both, too, were probably historically the centres of political control over wider *regiones*. Ely is described as a *villa regia* by Bede, and the Isle (according to *Liber Eliensis*) was given by Æthelthryth as a dowry by her husband Tondberht of the

¹⁴³ Cyril Hart has drawn attention to the lack of Benedictine monasteries in the eastern Danelaw, suggesting as an 'obvious' explanation the tenurial freedom of the Danish settlers: Hart, 'Æthelstan Half-king', p. 599. The size of both St Benet's endowment and subsequent post-Conquest foundations gives the lie to this. A more plausible explanation for a lack of interest in reformed communities may be Michael Franklin's observation that weakened episcopal control in the east led to a more rapid growth in *eigenkirchen*: Franklin, 'Minsters and Parishes: Northamptonshire Studies', p. 11.

¹⁴⁴ Dawtry, 'Benedictine revival in the north'.

¹⁴⁵ The cemeteries are Cambridgeshire SMR nos 02074 and 02104. See also Meaney, *Gazetteer of Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Sites*, p. 64.

¹⁴⁶ The cemetery is Cambridgeshire SMR no. 01666, the cup no. 00585b.

South Gywre.¹⁴⁷ Peterborough, as *Medeshamstede*, perhaps controlled the two *regiones* of the Gyrwe and Widderingas.¹⁴⁸

The background to the other sites chosen for reformed monasteries is less easy to pinpoint. By good fortune, a recent campaign of intensive fieldwork, the Fenland Project, has done much to elucidate the entire archaeological history of large tracts of the Fenland in Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire. Through fieldwalking, aerial photography, stray finds, available documentary evidence and, on occasion, excavation, this project has provided an invaluable framework from which to study Crowland, Ramsey and Thorney.

Crowland

Superficially, Crowland seems most easy to discuss, through its associations with the legendary hermit saint, Guthlac. Strictly speaking, the evidence for Guthlac is not historical but literary, deriving from a *vita* written by Felix at the request of King Ælfwald of East Anglia (c.713–49).¹⁴⁹ The *Life* tells of Guthlac, a Mercian of royal extraction born c.674, who spent nine years as a warrior and who probably tried, but failed, to gain the Mercian kingship.¹⁵⁰ Thereafter he became a hermit in his father Penwalh's powerbase area of Middle Anglia, in which Crowland lay. The *Life* gives no hint of a *monasterium* being founded but this is probably to misunderstand the nature of contemporary religious foundations where even hermits could be attended.¹⁵¹ Guthlac's sister Pega also lived there, a blind man desiring to be cured being brought by boat to the island and 'there sought out Pega' who 'allowed him to be led into the oratory in which the body of the blessed Guthlac lay'.¹⁵² Subsequently Felix refers to 'Cissa, who now in our times possesses the seat of Guthlac'.¹⁵³ These suggest a local shrine and perhaps a small community to guard it.¹⁵⁴ It seems possible that Guthlac's cult subsequently faded, only becoming revived in the wake of the tenth-century monastic reform.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁷ *HE*, iv, 19; *LE*, i, 4.

¹⁴⁸ Franklin, 'Minsters and parishes: Northamptonshire studies', p. 124; Potts, 'Pre-Danish estate of Peterborough Abbey', pp. 21–5; Peterson, 'Studies in the early history of Peterborough Abbey', pp. 50–5; King, 'Town of Peterborough'.

¹⁴⁹ Colgrave (ed. and transl.), *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*. Felix is often described as 'of Crowland' (e.g. Bradley (ed. and transl.), *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 248), but this is never made explicit in his own writings; in truth 'we know little or nothing about the author': Swanton (ed. and transl.), *Anglo-Saxon Prose*, p. 39. Given the lack of firm evidence for any early *monasterium* at Crowland, and the *vita* being written at King Ælfwald's behest, Felix is as likely to have been from an East Anglian religious establishment. On the basis of its proximity to the Mercian sphere of influence, its Fenland location and royal associations, Ely provides as good a source as anywhere.

¹⁵⁰ Charles-Edwards, 'Early medieval kingships', p. 37.

¹⁵¹ Morris, *Churches in the Landscape*, pp. 93–6.

¹⁵² Colgrave (ed. and transl.), *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, pp. 168–9.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 148–9.

¹⁵⁴ Stocker has claimed that the whole island was co-extensive with the *monasterium*, and that several oratories over the island lived on to become elements such as chapels of the later abbey. His case relies on the model of individual oratories being accepted but the earliest evidence for any of these chapels is later medieval: Stocker, 'Early church in Lincolnshire', pp. 101–6.

¹⁵⁵ Additional details for his life and miracles are drawn from literary works including two poems known as 'Guthlac A' and 'Guthlac B' preserved in the 'Exeter Book' (Exeter Cathedral Library, MS 3501),

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Although over 250 years separate Pega's establishment of a shrine for her dead brother and the foundation of a Benedictine community by Abbot Thurketyl, it is possible that religious observance (perhaps) and the sanctity of the place (probably) had been maintained at Crowland.

The archaeological evidence for the site is equivocal. The work of the Fenland Project has shown that Crowland remained a very long, thin, island, from the Roman to medieval periods (Fig. 27). The whole area has been extensively fieldwalked to a high standard and the evidence must therefore provide an accurate picture of the local settlement patterns.¹⁵⁶ The whole area of Crowland is almost devoid of finds from the Roman period, with absolutely no evidence for any Early or Middle Anglo-Saxon occupation. The lack of any Late Anglo-Saxon occupation evidence from around the abbey is probably due to Crowland now being extensively built up. While this has denied the opportunity for fieldwork close to the abbey site, it allowed for the discovery of chance finds during building work; in fact, none have been made, in contrast to the situation at Ramsey (see below).

It seems more reasonable to suggest that the lack of evidence should be taken at face value, and that the whole island of Crowland was one of very low intensity occupation, and probably only properly settled with the establishment of the Benedictine monastery. In such circumstances, Crowland appears to have been isolated and its environs unoccupied both during Guthlac's time and during that of the subsequent Benedictine foundation.

Ramsey

At Ramsey, detailed fieldwork has again suggested that settlement grew up because of the monastery; indeed, 'no Early or Middle Saxon sites were discovered during the survey, and none would be expected on the clay terrain'.¹⁵⁷ Not only was there a lack of previous Anglo-Saxon settlement; no Iron Age or Roman material was found,¹⁵⁸ again indicating an overall lack of continuity in the site. To

which is palaeographically dated to the second half of the tenth century. The poems' composition is traditionally dated to the late eighth century (see for instance Bradley (ed. and transl.), *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, pp. 248–9). Recently a strong case has been made for 'Guthlac A' to date to c.950–70 on account of its close associations with reformist literature, notably the Rule of St Benedict and Abbot Smaragdus' *Expositio in Regulam Sancti Benedicti*, written c.816 but circulated more widely only later: Conner, 'Source studies: The Old English Guthlac "A"'. Similarly, an Old English translation of the *Life* (BL MS Cotton Vespasian D.xxi, at fols 18–40v) 'follows the narrative outline quite closely' and occurs in an eleventh-century collection of biblical translations and other writings: Swanton (ed. and transl.), *Anglo-Saxon Prose*, p. 39.

¹⁵⁶ Fieldwalking at Crowland was done to 'type two' level, that is, land where 'the number of sites found (of all periods) would not be increased by type one coverage'. 'Type one' coverage describes fields walked in 30m transects in good or excellent visibility: Hayes and Lane, *The Fenland Project No. 5*, p. 9.

¹⁵⁷ Hall, *The Fenland Project no. 6*, p. 42.

¹⁵⁸ The only evidence for any Roman occupation comes from the chance finds of sherds in the town. A coin hoard found near Worlick is well removed from the site of the abbey. The chance finds are nearly all antiquarian and range from a 'Roman pavement' recorded by Stukely in 1774 (perhaps medieval and relating to the abbey), to Roman pottery and a Samian-ware bowl (Hall, *Fenland Project No. 6*, microfiche). Although some Roman occupation is suggested, its scarcity is reflected by there being no Roman map prepared for Ramsey's entry in this volume of the Fenland reports.

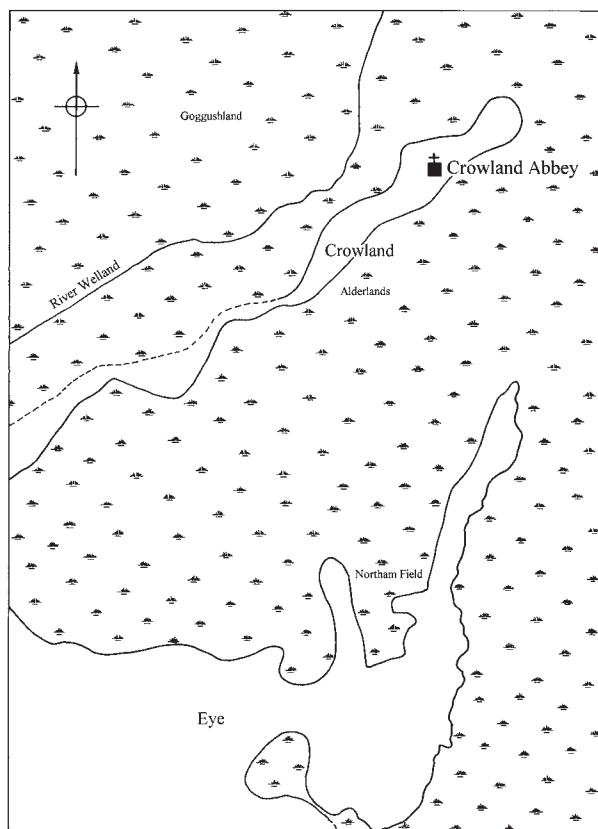


Fig. 27. The topographical setting of Crowland Abbey in the Late Anglo-Saxon period.

the north of the abbey, the construction of several modern buildings has revealed large quantities of pottery, all of post-Conquest date, apparently best interpreted as midden material from the abbey rather than evidence of settlement.¹⁵⁹ The only possible feature of antiquity on the site is topographical, 'Cnute's Dyke', which is possibly a canal associated with the importation of stone for the abbey buildings. Potentially, it could belong to the late tenth century although there is no dating evidence to prove this.

Topographically, Ramsey stood on an isthmus of land jutting into the surrounding fen, isolated from nearby occupation. The fact that the house's *Liber Benefactorum* calls this land an 'isle' emphasises contemporary perceptions of the place even if, strictly speaking, topographically untrue. If devoid of wider settlement itself, Ramsey lay close to the important local power-base of its founder, Æthelwine, at Upwood, approximately two miles away from the abbey. Here Æthelwine had his hall and kept his court on land given to him by King Edgar.¹⁶⁰ This whole area, subsequently to become the *banleuca* of Ramsey, centred upon Bury, an estate given from the royal fisc and which had at its centre a

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁶⁰ Hart, 'Foundation of Ramsey Abbey', pp. 308–9.

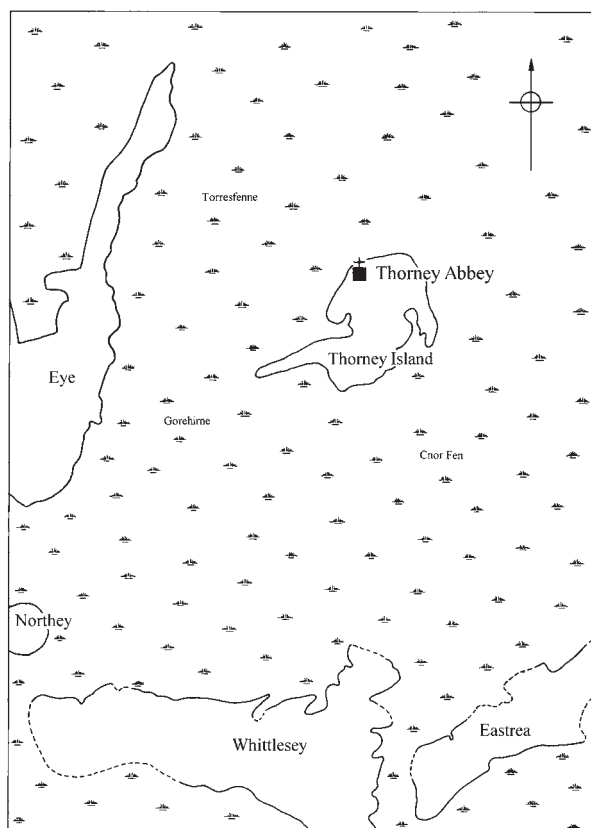


Fig. 28. The topographical setting of Thorney Abbey in the Late Anglo-Saxon period.

burh and minster church. The Benedictine monastery was therefore located away from this centre in an isolated and peripheral position.

Thorney

A remote situation is also apparent at Thorney, an isolated spot with no evidence for continuity or local settlement and where ‘only a limited area of dry land, under the present village, was available in the Saxon period’.¹⁶¹ Intensive fieldwalking has shown a continuity of occupation from the Iron Age to Roman periods, concentrated on the western extent of the parish away from the known abbey site (Fig. 28). This archaeological evidence for an isolated island site with little or no earlier occupation contrasts with the historical record which describes the island, then called *Ancarig*, as the site of a hermitage first recorded s.a. 656 in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. The current place-name, derived from *Pornige* or ‘thorn island’, is a form attested from the late tenth century onwards (that is, from the same time as the Benedictine foundation).¹⁶² This early history is problematical.

¹⁶¹ Hall, *The Fenland Project No. 2*, p. 52.

¹⁶² Ekwall, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, p. 467.

Although the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* gives an early date for *Ancarig*, the mention is found only in the 'E' version of the text, the so-called Laud or Peterborough Chronicle.¹⁶³ This Peterborough redaction incorporated many local additions, notably the long 656 entry describing the foundation of Peterborough Abbey, then called *Medeshamstede*, along with its forged foundation charter and extent, and the mention of *Ancarig*. The 'E' text was written c.1121 with continuations up to 1154, and so the text is a late witness.¹⁶⁴ Indeed, the sources it uses from which to assert the early foundation of *Ancarig* are unclear and there is no positive evidence to identify *Ancarig* with the old and well-established name of Thorney.¹⁶⁵ Just as the Peterborough Chronicle provides uncertain evidence for the antiquity of *Ancarig*, neither the Bury St Edmunds text the *Annals of St Neots* (ending at 914, compiled c.1120×1140), based on an archaic version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, nor the *Chronicon Æthelweardi* (written 978×988), have any mention of *Ancarig*.¹⁶⁶ Instead, the tradition seems to begin with Thorney Abbey's foundation charter (S 792), the so-called 'Privileges of Æthelwold', generally regarded as unreliable or spurious, and which mentions 'in the place which was formerly *Ancarig*, now in fact called by the name Thorney'.¹⁶⁷

Although the veracity of the privileges is in question, at stake is the earliest appearance of *Ancarig* and its legendary first occupants. The story may date from at least 973×975 if S 792 contains a genuine core.¹⁶⁸ Certainly it was current by the first half of the eleventh century, when the relics of Thancred, Torhtred and Tova were included in the *List of Saints' Resting Places*, compiled 1013×c.1031.¹⁶⁹ There appears to be no other independent evidence of either this hermitage or its occupants and Folchard of St Bertin claimed to have extracted information from the abbey's privileges for his *Prologue* to a larger hagiographical work, written before the mid-1080s.¹⁷⁰ The *Life* of the three saints derived from an early twelfth-century Peterborough volume attributed to Folchard and contains little more information than the foundation charter.¹⁷¹

Cecily Clark has considered the possible historicity of the three saints and suggested that local tradition of their hermitage may have been maintained.¹⁷²

¹⁶³ Oxford, Bodleian MS Laud 636. The 'E' text is a Peterborough Chronicle in only its final form, being a Northumbrian edition of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, subsequently extended in Canterbury: Rositzke (ed.), *The Peterborough Chronicle*, p. 6.

¹⁶⁴ The destruction of much of Peterborough Abbey by fire in 1116 perhaps led to the borrowing of the text from Canterbury for copying c.1121: Garmonsway (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, p. xxxix.

¹⁶⁵ Rositzke (ed.), *The Peterborough Chronicle*, p. 165.

¹⁶⁶ Dumville and Lapidge (eds), *Annals of St Neots*; Campbell (ed.), *Chronicle of Æthelweard*.

¹⁶⁷ The charter is edited and printed by Hart, *Early Charters of Eastern England*, pp. 165–86, although for errors contained here see Whitelock's review in *English Historical Review*, 84 (1969), pp. 112–15 at p. 144.

¹⁶⁸ Hart, *Early Charters of Eastern England*, pp. 183–6; Kennedy, 'Law and litigation', pp. 133 n. 13 and 138 n. 28.

¹⁶⁹ Rollason, 'List of saints' resting places', p. 68.

¹⁷⁰ Folchard, from St Bertin in Flanders, was appointed abbot of Thorney by William the Conqueror c.1068 but never received episcopal benediction and was deposed in 1085 by Archbishop Lanfranc at the Council of Gloucester: Chibnall (ed.), *Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, ii, p. 344 n. 3. Folchard is known to have written *Lives* of a number of saints: *VCH Cambridgeshire*, ii, pp. 211–12.

¹⁷¹ Now BL Harley MS 3097. Clark, 'Notes on a Life', p. 48.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 48–9.

She has argued that the uniqueness of the brothers' names and the rarity of 'Tova' are compatible with pre-Viking naming and therefore 'would hardly have been invented in the late tenth century or after, unless the forger had had an antiquarians' knowledge of early personal names'.¹⁷³ However, her difficulty in presenting plausible derivations for the names makes it easier to believe that these similar and alliterative forms are, indeed, invention. It can hardly have been too strenuous to create or use names in the tenth century that were of antiquated form. Characteristically, the three saints are also accorded an occupation of the site during the First Viking Age, one of the brothers having been martyred and the site being laid to waste 'by pagans'. These are very standard *topoi*, and since 'no history commends to us their way of life, nor does any page of ancestral narrative record it' as Folchard himself put it,¹⁷⁴ it is perhaps as likely that these saints never existed.

Instead, their presence has every appearance of fitting the context of a foundation by Bishop Æthelwold. They provided Thorney with relics to be developed by the new monastery to act as a focus for devotion. As important was the inherited sanctity of site the saints brought, allowing a symbolic rebirth of religious life at Thorney. The eremitical existence of the former occupants may also have been useful: it stressed the wilderness nature of the site and, by extension, the unworldly aims and expectations of the new Benedictine community.

More cynically, a potential *raison d'être* of *Ancarig* was to give Thorney a background and sanctity directly analogous to the better attested hermitage of St Guthlac at Crowland. It should occasion no surprise to find Crowland was the nearest Fenland foundation to Thorney: the two sites are only five miles apart and enjoy intervisibility across the Fens. In the context of new foundations struggling to establish themselves with external patronage, the need for a house cult was probably perceived as important as an endowment of land title. It was perhaps to boost the uncertain cult of Thancred, Torhtred and Tova that Botolph's relics were soon translated to Thorney. The need for these Fenland Benedictine houses to have relics was seen soon after in the promotion of cults surrounding a Persian bishop (St Ivo) at Slepe and of a Cornish saint (St Neot) at Eynesbury. The need for saintly cults was to remain an ongoing concern for many monasteries well into the post-Conquest period and could be seen at Holm St Benet's with the cults of Wolfric and Margaret, and at Norwich Cathedral Priory with St William of Norwich. The birth and nurturing of these particular cults need have had little to do with any historical reality.¹⁷⁵

From the initial wave of Benedictine foundations, two principal features emerge: the desire to select a site seen as having connotations of sanctity, and for those built *de novo*, an isolated position. The aim of the monastic reform in restoring primacy to basic ascetic religious conditions, seen in the Rule of St Benedict and the *Regularis Concordia*, thus seems to have influenced the location of new monasteries.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁷⁵ For the cult of Margaret see Luxford, 'St Margaret of Holm'. For William see Jessopp and James (eds and transl.), *Miracles of St William of Norwich*, and Anderson, *A Saint at Stake*.

The associations and *topoi* which houses in the Fens could engender are clear, and amply portrayed in the *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* with the marshes inhabited by shadowy demons and monsters. The extent to which this was a more commonly shared experience or viewpoint is less clear. We have already seen for the Middle Anglo-Saxon period how many *monasteria* and estate centres may have been sited in defensive topographical situations, for instance partially protected by low marshy land as at Brandon. Ramsey, Crowland and Thorney, by contrast, show a more specific liminality and at Ramsey, the monastery appears to have been deliberately sited away from an important secular/estate centre at Upwood. For the monks, literary works such as the *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* and *Beowulf* may have provided useful vehicles in the promotion of their own liminal existence, enhancing an image of ascetism. Certainly, it is notable that many such literary works underwent a renaissance in their writing, copying or creation in the wake of the monastic reform. The symbolic power of isolated locations would have been further heightened by each monastery's vast landholdings centred upon new, removed, sites. On this basis, the Benedictine movement could be seen as something new and different, just like the strict communal life they promoted; they were, in effect, being seen to live the life they preached. The rub, or course, was that this was not a consistent picture, as the reuse of the earlier power centres of Ely and Peterborough proves. In itself, this may have provided a spur to monks to emphasise their eremitic life in their writings. A final example demonstrates this paradox.

Holm St Benet's

Holm St Benet's can reasonably be argued to date from c.1022. The site chosen lies on the banks of the River Bure and is a distinct feature in the low-lying surrounding marshland; it is, to all intents and purposes, isolated. However, this picture of total isolation is tempered by other archaeological data which make it clear that the foundation was originally a central component within a wider part of the Early Medieval landscape. Immediately to the west of the holm site, the River Ant flows into the Bure from the north-west to form a peninsula of land once closed off to the west by a (now flattened) earthwork (Plate 6). Fieldwalking has shown the area within contains Middle and Late Anglo-Saxon pottery as well as medieval material.¹⁷⁶ The monastery is reached by a causeway still extant in part and whose course can be traced on aerial photographs stretching over about a mile (one and a half kilometres).¹⁷⁷ The monastery now lies over the Ant but this is due to the river having changed its course; the Anglo-Saxon arrangement is shown in Fig. 29.

The holm site itself is under-investigated archaeologically. Scheduling has precluded intensive fieldwork although detailed geophysical and earthworks surveys of the entire precinct area were conducted in 1994 and 1996

¹⁷⁶ Rose, 'A linear earthwork at Horning', p. 35.

¹⁷⁷ For instance Cambridge Air Photo Collection RC8 AX 63, 44 and 29 (overlapping in that order), taken 20/5/75.



Plate 6. Aerial photograph taken in 1974 showing the ploughed-out linear earthwork originally cutting off the peninsula of land upon which Holm St Benet's Abbey, Norfolk, was sited. The River Bure is at the bottom, with Horning church along the left-hand edge. Photograph by David Wilson/ copyright Cambridge University Collection no. RC8-AO34.

Landscapes of Monastic Foundation

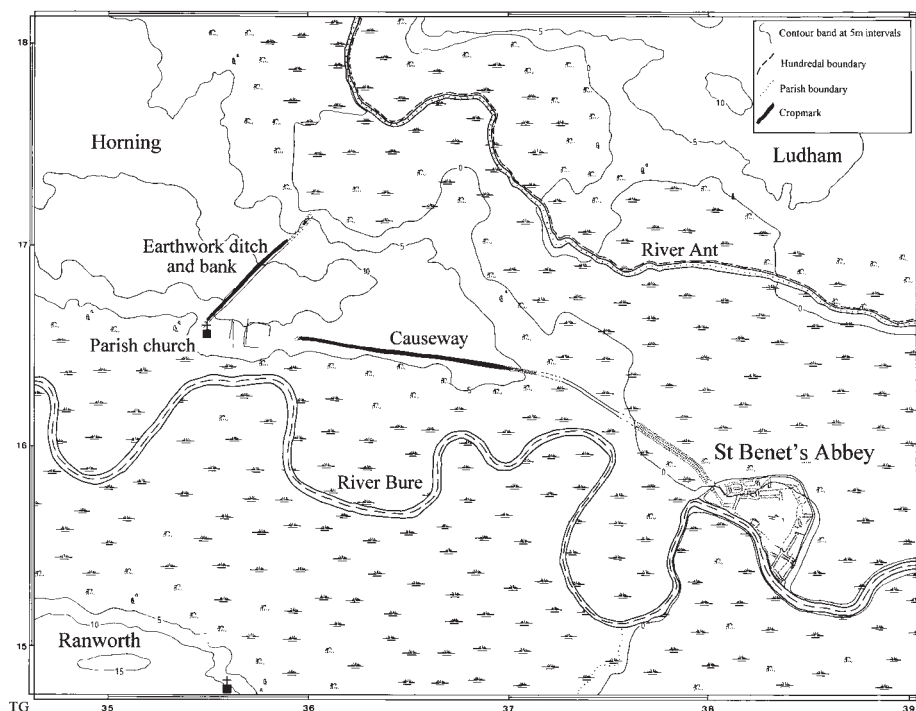


Fig. 29. The Anglo-Saxon topography of Holm St Benet's Abbey, Norfolk, and its environs.

respectively.¹⁷⁸ Sieving of upcast spoil from molehills and examination of the exposed sides in the riverbank have failed to yield even a sherd of any pottery earlier than Local Medieval Unglazed wares of the twelfth century onwards, despite the recovery of some earlier (prehistoric) finds.¹⁷⁹ Nevertheless, a few finds have been made, for instance a pot found in 1936 and now in the Castle Museum, Norwich. Although catalogued as Late Anglo-Saxon by the former curator Rainbird Clarke, its shape and sagging base clearly point to a later date, probably of the thirteenth century, notwithstanding its curious fabric.¹⁸⁰ More securely dated is an iron spearhead of characteristically Late Anglo-Saxon form. It was dredged from the river adjacent to the abbey in 1937 and, given the empty marshland surrounding the holm site, must be related to St Benet's.¹⁸¹ Most

¹⁷⁸ Linford, *The Abbey of St Benet at Holm* and RCHME, *The Abbey of St Benet at Holm, Horning*.

¹⁷⁹ Two surveys have been conducted, one by the Norfolk Archaeological and Historical Research Group (unpublished report in the Norfolk SMR, no. 5199) but reproduced in the other, Field, 'Artefacts recovered from the molehills'. Together, the surveys have produced 44 Medieval sherds, 55 Late Medieval-Transitional wares of fifteenth-century date and 37 Post-Medieval sherds. The overwhelming nature of later material is backed up by the amount of later brick and tile fragments also found. Earlier occupation is attested by several worn flint flakes, a small scraper and a microlithic blade. Separate investigation of the molehills and eroded sections of the river bank by the present author have reiterated the results of the preceding reports.

¹⁸⁰ Accession number 1947.13. I am grateful to Mr Bill Milligan, the former Assistant Keeper of Archaeology at Norwich Castle Museum, for allowing me to examine this pot.

¹⁸¹ The spearhead is now in Norwich Castle Museum, accession number 1937.126.



Plate 7. Lead plaque or plate bearing a Norse runic inscription, found in a molehill at St Benet's Abbey, Norfolk.

significant is the chance discovery in 2003 – ironically in molehill spoil – of a folded lead plate, bearing seven lines of an inscription in Scandinavian runes (Plate 7). The plate measures some 30×36mm, originally some 30×70mm unwrapped, and is pierced at one end with a small hole, presumably for attachment. The object has the appearance of having been deliberately folded. By analogy the plate is perhaps best seen as an example of a funerary inscription similar to one found at Bawburgh in Norfolk.¹⁸² Unfortunately, the inscription has so far defied successful interpretation, despite its transcription being relatively straightforward.¹⁸³ A funerary interpretation is perhaps supported by the object being found just to the east of the abbey church's high altar – an area likely to have been used for burials, probably including persons of high status. Like the spearhead, this plate is of tenth- or more probably eleventh-century date, and does nothing to contradict a foundation and occupation date for St Benet's under Cnut. Topographically, however, St Benet's Abbey would appear to have been based upon an early estate centre. Indeed, the limited pottery recovered in fieldwalking may suggest a Middle Anglo-Saxon origin, although the flattened earthwork is clearly the most important element.

Not only was the earthwork a very large physical feature; it takes as its closest parallel Early Medieval defensive ditches and dykes. Most interesting is that the land unit enclosed, in the parish of Horning, takes as its best parallel a similar arrangement at Horningsea in Cambridgeshire. Evidence of early settlement

¹⁸² See below, pp. 147–8.

¹⁸³ The object is now in Norwich Castle Museum, accession number 2003.54. A full description of this important find is being prepared for publication in *Medieval Archaeology*. For information about the runes I am grateful to John Hines and David Parsons.

seems to be supported by the place-name Horning, from OE *Horningas*, 'the people at the *horna* or bend' or '(settlement of) the people living at the horn-shaped hill or piece of land'.¹⁸⁴ This derivation is fundamentally the same as that for Horningsea.¹⁸⁵ More recently, Ken Penn has suggested that Horning may once have belonged to an even larger land unit focused upon North Walsham.¹⁸⁶ If this was the case, a division must have occurred at an early date since the northern parish boundaries of Belaugh, Hoveton, Ashmanhaugh, Beeston St Lawrence and Barton Turf form an all but straight line (Fig. 30). In fact, this perhaps suggests the former presence of two early estates, one originally focussed upon Horning. The size of the earthwork would certainly not contradict this.

A final indication suggesting the importance of this enclosed peninsula is the positioning of Horning parish church. Although containing no fabric earlier than the twelfth century, it is set over and just inside the southern end of the earthwork, a position paralleled identically by Fen Ditton church in what was once the larger parish of St Peter's, Horningsea (Fig. 31).¹⁸⁷ This arrangement is reminiscent of other, early, Anglo-Saxon churches, for instance Cedd's seventh-century foundation of St Peter's, Bradwell-on-Sea, positioned astride the west wall of the Roman shore fort of *Othona*.¹⁸⁸ While this might indicate an estate centre focussed upon Horning, providing a suitable location and endowment for a subsequent Benedictine abbey, we may go further. The sheer size of the Horning earthwork shows its creator to have had a major controlling interest in the surrounding landscape and the protection of the peninsula, which hints at this land being an early royal estate. This would again be paralleled by Horningsea's description as of 'royal status'.¹⁸⁹ Intriguingly, although St Benet's is usually described as an island site, isostatic fluctuations suggest that by the tenth century it was probably set within low-lying but dry land much as it is today. It would still have stood out, but it need not have been so remote as it is usually portrayed.¹⁹⁰

Tradition surrounding the foundation of St Benet's seems to follow the path set by several reform houses. Its earliest origins are shadowy and documented in house histories, the most important of which is commonly cited as being John of Oxenedes' *Chronica*, finished c.1292.¹⁹¹ The chronicle, not certainly by this named monk of St Benet's, in fact contains only a single reference to the abbey's foundation, as by Cnut.¹⁹² Instead, the main early history of the house derives from a short account which I shall call the *Historia Sancti Benedicti de Hulmo*, published by Sir Henry Ellis as an appendix to his edition of Oxenedes' *Chronica*.

¹⁸⁴ Ekwall, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, p. 251; Mills, *A Dictionary of English Place-Names*, p. 179.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

¹⁸⁶ Penn, 'Early Church in Norfolk', p. 45 and fig. 1.

¹⁸⁷ The parishes of Fen Ditton and Horningsea were only divided finally, with their boundary fixed, in 1412: CRO, P94/4/1, p. 127.

¹⁸⁸ Taylor and Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, i, pp. 91–3; Peers, 'On Saxon churches', pp. 420–3.

¹⁸⁹ See above Chapter 3, pp. 86–8.

¹⁹⁰ Williamson, *The Norfolk Broads*, p. 28.

¹⁹¹ Ellis (ed.), *Chronica Johannis de Oxenedes*.

¹⁹² John's authorship is in fact attested only through a mid-seventeenth-century hand at the head of the *Chronica* in the original manuscript. No other internal evidence confirms this identification.

Monastic reform in the Later Anglo-Saxon period

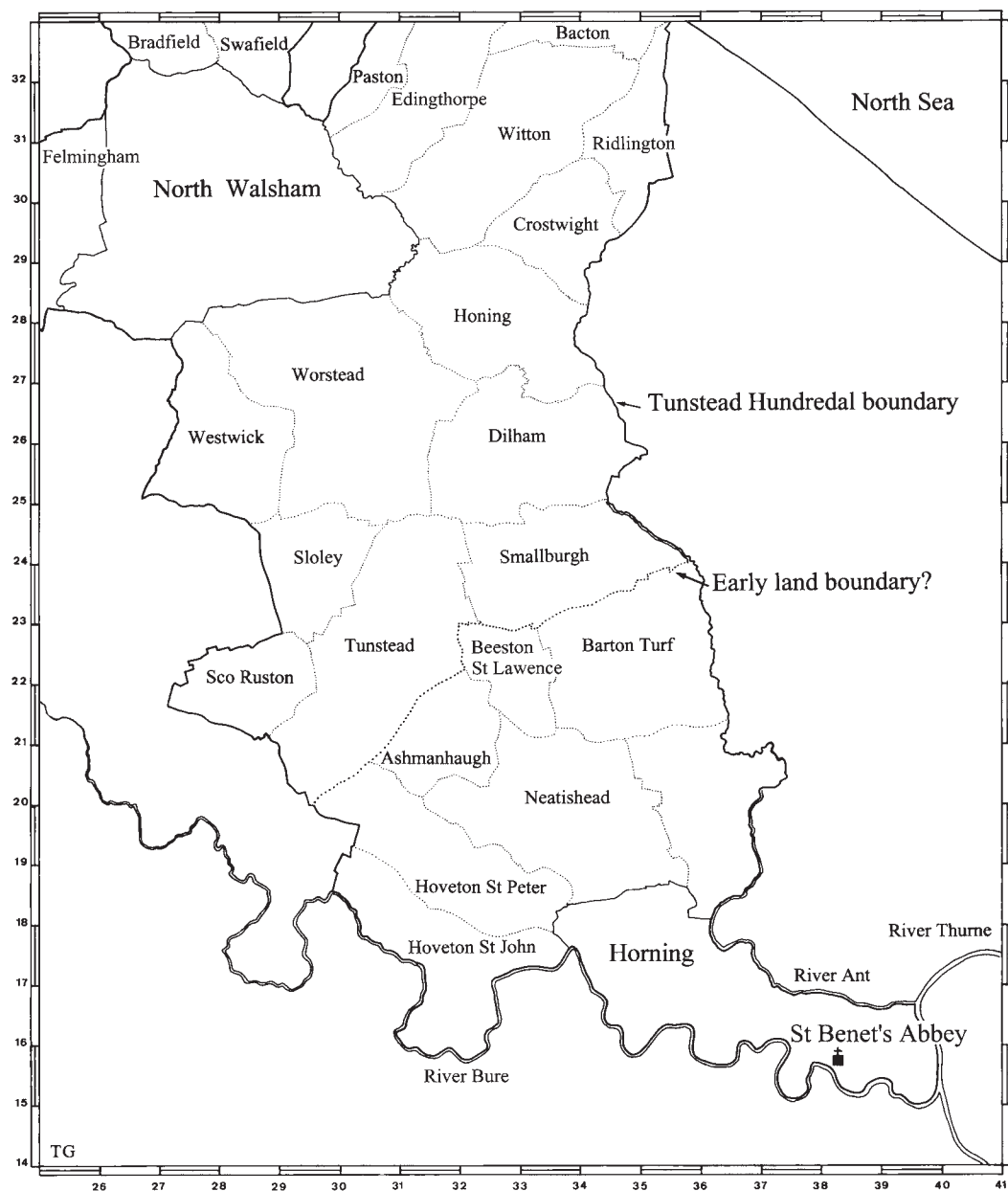


Fig. 30. Parish boundaries in the vicinity of North Walsham and Horning, Norfolk.

Landscapes of Monastic Foundation

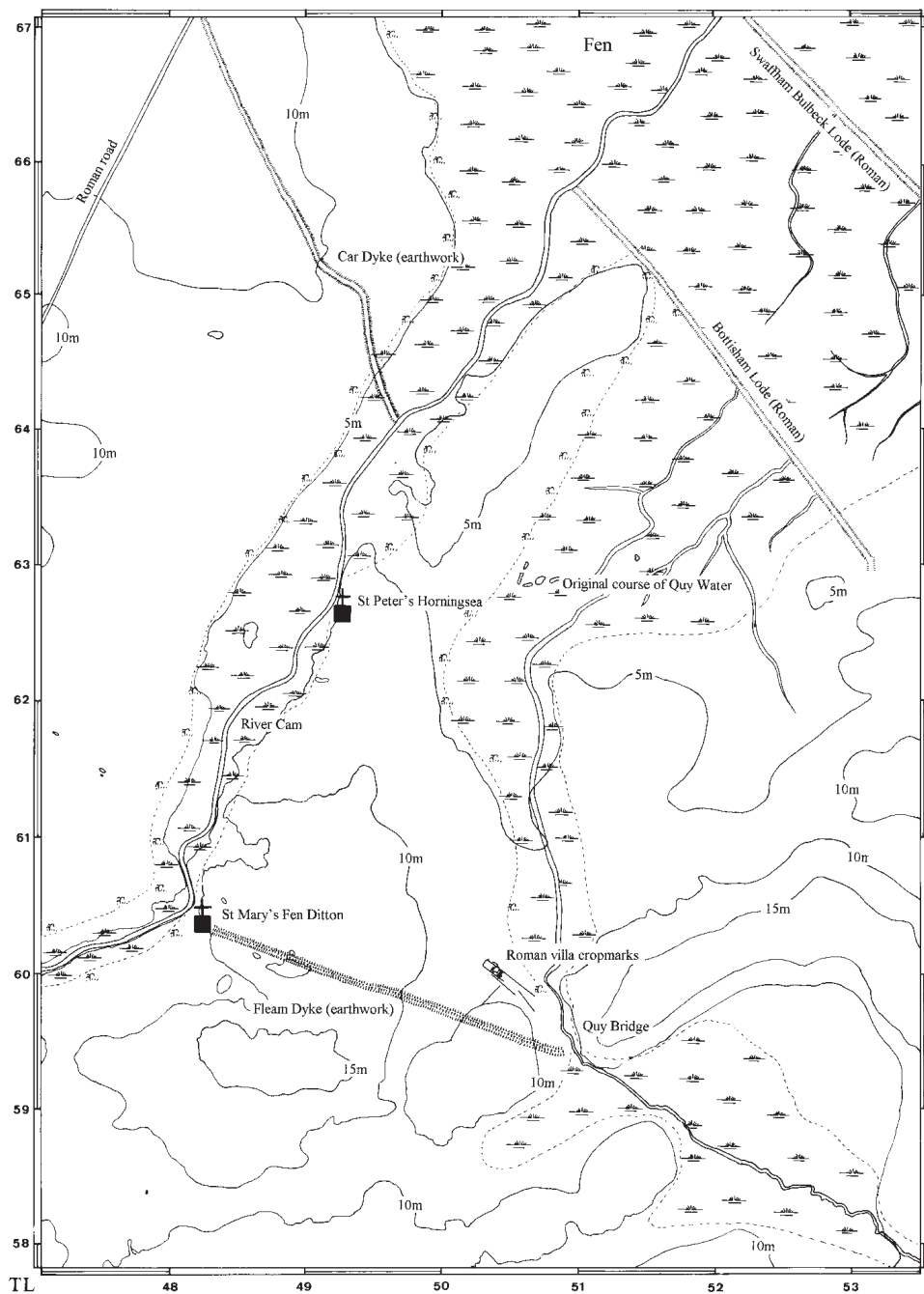


Fig. 31. The topographical setting of Horningsea and the Fleam Dyke, Cambs.

While Oxenedes' *Chronica* is known from two manuscripts,¹⁹³ the *Historia* survives only in a unique text preceding the Cottonian Oxenedes 'like a detached tract . . . upon the two sides of a single separated leaf'.¹⁹⁴ Since this leaf is of fourteenth-century date like the copy of Oxenedes to which it is attached, but ends in 1275, both texts seem to be copies of thirteenth-century versions (which in turn strengthens the uncertainty that the *Historia* is also the work of 'Oxenedes'). The *Historia*'s complementary nature to the *Chronica* is probably the reason for their incorporation in a single manuscript copy. It is unclear how much original material the author of the *Historia* drew upon for his account and, since the work was first written in the late thirteenth century, there must by then have been much scope for a considerable body of house tradition to have developed and be incorporated.

According to the *Historia*, the first occupant of Holm was one Wolfric, who occupied the site with companions before their foundation was recognised by Cnut who endowed it with three manors. Wolfric came to be venerated as a saint and buried in the subsequent abbey, later joined by another saint, Margaret, martyred c.1170 or 1180 at nearby Hoveton St John.¹⁹⁵ At no point is an earlier origin to the site ascribed, yet such a tradition is evident in another chronicle from St Benet's. Called the *Chronica Minor Sancti Benedicti de Hulmo* by Romilly in the revised edition of Ellis' Oxenedes, the work is witnessed in the same two manuscripts containing Oxenedes' *Chronica*. The Cotton version is the earlier, written in a thirteenth-century script and partially burnt in the Cotton Library fire. Like the *Historia*, it was bound up with Oxenedes' *Chronica* after the fire, although the text was left highly defective and missing a considerable portion at the beginning, as the second version in the Newcastle manuscript shows.¹⁹⁶ According to the *Chronica Minor*, the abbey's origin lay with a small company of monks or recluses under the direction of an individual named Suneman. All were killed at the time of the Danish invasions and King Edmund's martyrdom. This

¹⁹³ London, BL MS Cotton Nero D.ii. and a manuscript in the collection of the Duke of Newcastle (hereafter 'Newcastle', not noted in Ker's *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain* or Ker and Watson's 1987 *Supplement*). The discovery of the Newcastle MS has caused some confusion as it was incorporated into an undated reprint of Ellis' edition of Oxenedes' *Chronica*, to show textual variations. This caused the pagination to change, although no acknowledgement of editor or new date is given on the title page. I have, naturally, used this later edition of Oxenedes which is also the one used for the 1969 Kraus reprint (Nendeln/Liechtenstein).

¹⁹⁴ Ellis (ed.), *Chronica Johannis de Oxenedes*, p. v.

¹⁹⁵ On the evidence of William Worcester, Margaret's death had been placed at 1170: Harvey (ed.), *Itineraries of William Worcester*, pp. 228–9. However, Luxford has recently argued that the martyrdom should be placed at 1180: 'Saint Margaret of Holm', especially at pp. 114 and 116.

¹⁹⁶ The two manuscripts show several divergent readings demonstrating that the Cotton manuscript, although earlier, did not act as an exemplar for the Newcastle text. For instance, the clear individual annal entries for 1003–07 in Cotton Nero D.ii are garbled and conflated in Newcastle into one entry, of 1003. Newcastle, though, preserves the correct author of Bury's Benedictinisation in 1020, Cnut, rather than the *Henricus rex* of Cotton. Since the (earlier) Cotton text only survives up to 1072, it is unclear whether the original was actually a St Benet's chronicle. Its only entries of East Anglian interest are late and show more interest in Bury St Edmunds, for instance detailing the movement of the saint's relics to and from London, and describing the death of Ufi, Bury's first abbot, in 1044. This suggests a chronicle whose base-stock in fact originated at Bury. This is further emphasised by the earliest references to St Benet's; the first is tied in with the death of Edmund s.a. 870 but the next is the notice of Abbot Richard's death in 1125.

house tradition was to become widely disseminated, reappearing in the Jervaulx abbot John of Brompton's fifteenth-century *Chronicon*.¹⁹⁷ Curiously, a different tradition appears to have reached Leiston Abbey in Suffolk by the mid-fourteenth century where, in a list of foundation dates, Holm is said to have been established in 633. This is a unique witness with little to commend it, for instance there being nothing in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* or subsequent other chronicles, for which Holm's foundation could have been substituted in.¹⁹⁸

The legends again follow a formulaic pattern of reclusive community, dislocation, refoundation on a holy spot and subsequent endowment. St Benet's therefore fits into a more general pattern of Late Anglo-Saxon Benedictine foundations, both in terms of its location and foundation legends; it shows the desire to found monasteries on sites which could be claimed as isolated and that the desire for a tradition of sanctity consequently continued for at least another half century after the height of the monastic reform.

MANIFESTATIONS OF SPIRITUAL DEVOTION IN EAST ANGLIA

Even if the religious life of tenth- and eleventh-century East Anglia has precious few contemporary witnesses, its importance for wider studies of ecclesiastical life in Anglo-Saxon England should not be disregarded. By 1086 the region was to be documented as one of the richest in the English nation and had one of the densest concentrations of churches in an emerging parochial network. Yet the forces of the tenth-century monastic reform appear to have touched the former kingdom only lightly. Little Domesday Book clearly reveals the existence of some minsters within East Anglia, and provides heavy hints at others, demonstrating the survival of religious communities and occasionally associated saints into the late eleventh century, in many cases (for example Blythburgh) probably in a direct line from the seventh and eighth centuries.¹⁹⁹

That a vibrant spiritual life existed in the region is suggested also in the hints we have for new foci of popular devotion. For instance, tradition relates how a chapel dedicated to the Virgin was built at Walsingham in Norfolk in 1061, in imitation of the Santa Casa in Nazareth. The site famously became one of the most significant places of pilgrimage in medieval England.²⁰⁰ More intriguing however, is an infinitely more local cult dedicated to Walstan, a figure who renounced his supposedly royal background to become a farm labourer. As with the foundation of Walsingham, the material upon which our knowledge of Walstan is based is poor, all hagiographical and later medieval. The example of Walstan certainly reflects a dynamic to late medieval religion within East Anglia, with the ongoing creation and veneration of local cults, but a pre-Conquest origin

¹⁹⁷ London, BL MS Cotton Tiberius, C.xiii, fol. 70v ff. This origin with Suneman was further recounted by Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, iii, p. 61 and by Cox in *VCH Norfolk*, ii, p. 330.

¹⁹⁸ For this witness see Luxford, 'Saint Margaret of Holm', p. 118 and pl. 31.

¹⁹⁹ See Chapter 3, pp. 91–2.

²⁰⁰ For a summary of the foundation story see *VCH Norfolk*, ii, p. 394. For the implications of this foundation, and the veracity of its origin tradition see Chapter 5, p. 195.

to this is not inconceivable.²⁰¹ The saint was certainly revered by the start of the fourteenth century because Bawburgh parish church, the locus of the cult, had its chancel rebuilt in 1309, and the rest of the building redecorated, all funded by pilgrims' offerings.²⁰² The earliest surviving source describing Walstan is a *vita* in the *Nova Legenda Angliæ* of John Capgrave (1393–1464), while a vernacular account, known as the 'Lambeth Life', was published in 1658.²⁰³ The latter is said to have been copied from a triptych formerly displayed in Bawburgh church.²⁰⁴

Walstan's life is set at the end of the tenth and start of the eleventh century, but there is little historical certainty to his life and no contemporary or even near-contemporary record of his existence. Were this to be all that were known of Walstan, such a pre-Conquest past might most reasonably be seen as an invention.²⁰⁵ Although there is nothing in Domesday Book to suggest any importance to Bawburgh church around the time of the Conquest, the discovery of an inscribed lead plate in an adjacent field by a metal detectorist in autumn 2002 has raised this intriguing possibility.²⁰⁶ The plate, a battered sheet of lead, has no obvious attachment points and is inscribed on both sides (Fig. 32). While an unusual find, the Bawburgh plate appears to have a number of parallels. Similar inscribed lead sheets have been found at, for instance, St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury, from Bath, just south of the abbey, and *in situ* inside Bishop Giso's tomb in Wells Cathedral. They appear to be used for funerary inscriptions to accompany the body and to date between the tenth and late eleventh centuries.²⁰⁷ While the Canterbury and Bath examples are shaped as crosses, the Bawburgh plate uses an inscribed cross on its obverse into which many other, smaller,

²⁰¹ Those benefiting from the miraculous cures of Walstan's shrine were not only East Anglian but very local, being within ten miles of Bawburgh, with one exception, a Canterbury weaver: Halliday, 'St Walstan of Bawburgh', pp. 14–15. The local nature of the cult is reflected in Walstan's apparent absence from any liturgical calendar: Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 200. However, Twinch, *In Search of St Walstan*, pp. 31–2, has claimed the 'Sancte Wlstan' present in a Bodleian manuscript, Lat. Liturgy. g.8 fol. 3v, refers to Walstan rather than St Wulfstan of Winchester. Given that the manuscript dates to the second quarter of the fifteenth century, when Walstan's cult was in full swing, and that it once belonged to Wymondham Abbey, some five miles away from Bawburgh, this is at least possible. For the manuscript see Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain*, p. 216.

²⁰² Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 200–1.

²⁰³ The text of *De Sancto Walstano Confessore* is most conveniently published in Horstmann (ed.), *Nova Legenda Anglie*, ii, pp. 412–15 and reproduced in James, 'Lives of St Walstan', pp. 244–9. A précis is provided in Blomefield and Parkin, *Essay Towards a Topographical History of Norfolk*, ii, pp. 387–8 and a translation by David Rollason is published in Twinch, *In Search of St Walstan*, pp. 169–72.

²⁰⁴ James, 'Lives of St Walstan', p. 249.

²⁰⁵ For example Walstan is said to have been of royal stock (a familiar enough *topos*) with close ties to the West Saxon line. He was supposedly born in 975 – the year the great Benedictine reformist King Edgar died, to be succeeded by Edward the Martyr – and died in 1016, also the year Edmund Ironside died and Cnut became king of England. For a resume of the accreted details associated with Walstan see Twinch, *In Search of St Walstan*, pp. 11–15.

²⁰⁶ I am pleased to acknowledge the assistance and enthusiasm of the finder, Mr Damien Alger, in reporting this find and making it available for detailed study.

²⁰⁷ For readings of the Canterbury and Bath inscriptions see Okasha, *Hand-List of Anglo-Saxon Non-Runic Inscriptions*, pp. 51–2 and 60. For Wells see Okasha, 'A supplement to Hand-list', p. 101 and Rodwell, 'Lead plaques from the tombs of the Saxon bishops of Wells'. Giso died in 1088: for a biography see Keynes, 'Giso, bishop of Wells'. The famous lead mortuary cross supposedly accompanying the body of King Arthur and excavated at Glastonbury Abbey 'was probably a tenth-century falsification which was "planted"': Rodwell, *Church Archaeology*, p. 19.



Fig. 32. Lead plate from Bawburgh, Norfolk, probably from a Late Anglo-Saxon burial. Scale 1:1. Drawn by Sue White.

crosses are inscribed.²⁰⁸ The Bawburgh plate has an enigmatic reading but a possible interpretation of the reverse is ‘...of St John, abbot *H[ear]dwerh, in the ground’. The obverse is less problematic, reading ‘Saward’, a form of the Old English masculine name Sæward, and presumably refers to the person being commemorated, appearing as it does within the inscribed cross.²⁰⁹ The inscription conceivably therefore refers to Saward being buried, perhaps in a foundation dedicated to St John, during the abbacy of *H[ear]dwerh. It would be dangerous to use the plate, or its uncertain reading, as evidence for an Anglo-Saxon religious community being based at Bawburgh in the eleventh century. Nevertheless, the rarity of such inscribed lead plates, and their characteristic appearance on monastic sites, does raise the intriguing possibility that devotion to Walstan had already taken hold at Bawburgh by the time of the Norman Conquest.²¹⁰

A more certain witness to an ongoing desire to support spiritual life, and to

²⁰⁸ These crosses themselves find parallels with funerary furniture, for instance the gravestone recovered in excavations at Hartlepool bearing a relief-decorated cross with smaller inscribed crosses in the corners: Daniels, ‘Anglo-Saxon monastery at Church Close’, p. 194 no. 38 and fig. 36. A similar idea, using crosses radiating from a central lozenge, appears in a more local context, that of a shelly-limestone grave-marker of probable eleventh- to thirteenth-century date from All Saints’ church, Barton Bendish in Norfolk: Margeson, ‘Sepulchral stone’, p. 32 and fig. 30.

²⁰⁹ Due to the uncertain nature of the reading, attention is duly directed to the forthcoming full publication of this object’s inscription in Okasha, ‘A third supplement to Hand-List’, no. 212. I am grateful to Professor Okasha for supplying me with a copy of her text in advance of publication.

²¹⁰ Another example of an inscribed lead plate is that known from the high-status settlement at Flixborough in Humberside: Okasha, ‘A second supplement to Hand-list’, pp. 46–7 and Webster and Backhouse, *Making of England*, cat. no. 69(a), p. 95. For an example from the minster church of Kirkdale in Yorkshire see Okasha forthcoming, ‘A third supplement to Hand-List’.

Monastic reform in the Later Anglo-Saxon period

create religious communities, occurs in the will of Ealdorman Ælfgar (946×951) and those of his daughters Æthelflæd (962×991) and Ælfflæd (1000×1002).²¹¹ Their concern to establish a family church 'for our ancestors' souls' saw them grant a number of estates, only for the endeavour ultimately to fail. While this illustrates the difficulties any nascent community had in attaining a viable endowment and retaining it (especially if grants were made in association with reversion clauses), the intentions of religious piety are clearly visible. Moreover, this patronage appears not to have been predicated by a Benedictine or 'secular' outlook on the part of founders.²¹² The will of Ælfflæd, for instance, made a number of bequests to Benedictine houses but also granted land to the minsters at Mersea and Sudbury.²¹³ Whatever the stresses endured by the community at Stoke, wider patronage of communal religious life endured into the eleventh century, as did the ambition to create new houses. The difference in the manifestation of these institutions, with stronger Benedictine patronage in areas outside East Anglia in the tenth and early eleventh centuries, therefore points to influences other than simple religious fervour. Instead, social and political associations also came to the fore. From the start, Benedictine monasticism was innately as political as it was spiritual, and in this fact we may see the single most likely reason for the curious, perhaps obdurate, absence of reform houses within the historical kingdom of East Anglia in the tenth century. The implications of politics for ecclesiastical foundations in the Later Anglo-Saxon period have been explored by Blair who has remarked how 'superior' minsters of Domesday Book 'reflect the political geography and royal power of post-Viking England'.²¹⁴

The pre-eminence achieved in East Anglia by the community at *Beodricesworth* following the death of King Edmund appositely demonstrates the fundamental identification of religion with political life, and the consequent impact on land ownership patterns that such patronage could bring. That this community should have no hints of a Benedictine past until the eleventh century, even as an origin myth, but was associated instead with King Cnut and the relatively insignificant monastery of Holm St Benet's, suggests that the people of East Anglia may have retained a distinctive regional identity. Within this, Edmund could be employed as a totem to highlight their unity and independence. More crucially, Benedictinism was readily associated with West Saxon political influence. Edmund's posthumous influence was to weigh again in the eleventh century during a time of 'new . . . political ambiguities'.²¹⁵ Once more, his cult could act as a focus for unification – this time to reconcile a Danish king with his new subject people. Control of this powerful community was best achieved in a

²¹¹ Whitelock (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, nos 2, 14 and 15.

²¹² This is a somewhat different interpretation from that presented by Cyril Hart who has seen some form of 'fundamental objection to the local establishment of monasteries existing in East Anglia': Hart, 'Æthelstan Half-king', p. 599. In fact, the will of Ælfgar leaves bequests to a variety of houses, including Bury St Edmunds, Barking, Christ Church Canterbury, and St Paul's, none then reformed. There is no evidence for Hart's assertion that Stoke represents 'our earliest evidence for lay participation in the English Benedictine reformation': 'Earliest Suffolk charter', p. 468.

²¹³ Whitelock (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, no. 15, pp. 38–41.

²¹⁴ Blair, 'Secular minster churches', p. 114.

²¹⁵ Dumville, *Liturgy and the Ecclesiastical History*, p. 143.

proven West Saxon tactic, by Benedictinisation.²¹⁶ The establishment of a Benedictine house at St Benet's as well as the regularisation of Bury makes this regional interest explicit. However, a general policy of Benedictinisation does not seem to have been attempted: these instances of foundation appear to have been restricted to the first six years of Cnut's twenty-year reign. Instead, Cnut appears to have pursued a more general patronage of the Church in attempting to secure his political foothold in England. Religious patronage was a simple and compelling vehicle for this expedient, and appears to have succeeded. By the twelfth century he and Queen Emma had attained a considerable reputation for largesse.²¹⁷ If Bury's regularisation was indeed an active display of Cnut's patronage and involvement, his presence in the subsequent consecration of the abbey church in 1032 may have been intended to re-stress the same associations of reconciliation made by his establishment of a minster at *Assandun*.

Cnut's ability to implement this policy probably depended in part on the increasing unification of England, and a decline in the fervour attached to the tenth-century monastic reform movement which, with its political implications, had polarised responses. As a Danish outsider and overlord, Cnut was also, arguably, able to transcend some of the more traditional responses to Benedictinism within East Anglia. The net result was to bring the East Anglian Church into line with the rest of southern England in having regularised monastic life, in addition to the wider existing network of minster churches.

Benedictinism also brought new cultural and religious practices to the region. Besides new uniform ways of dressing (in habits), new script forms were used for the increasing number of liturgical texts, saints' Lives, and cartularies required for worship. There remains little hard information on other forms of Late Anglo-Saxon monastic material culture, but locational analysis is revealing.²¹⁸ While monasteries were often placed, as at Ely and Peterborough, on sites with political importance and a history of sanctity, the location of new houses was undertaken in new ways. Perhaps most important, the new foundations

²¹⁶ Cnut has also been seen as the force behind the Benedictine monasteries at Buckfast in Devon, founded by Earl Aylward in 1018, and in the regularisation at Gloucester c.1022. The date of the latter, suggested by a grant of land (S 1424) regarded as authentic by Finberg, *Early Charters of West Midlands*, no. 151, has been questioned by Hare, *Two Anglo-Saxon Minsters of Gloucester*, pp. 14–15. However, it is interesting to note the general absence of Gloucester's houses from the documentary record between 925–6 and c.1022. In 925–6, King Æthelstan (924–39) issued a charter in favour of the New Minster at Gloucester, soon after the West Saxon king took over the government of Mercia, following the death of Æthelflæd, lady of the Mercians, in 918. Thereafter there is a gap in any mentions until the charter of c.1022. This absence of documentary evidence does not argue against reformed Benedictine life occurring at either the Old or New Minsters in Gloucester in the tenth century, but it is interesting to note the reappearance of the minsters in the eleventh century following certain Benedictinisation, for instance in the New Minster community witnessing the authentic charter (S 1399) with the monasteries of Evesham, Pershore and Worcester, 1033×1038: Hare, 'Documentary evidence', p. 33.

²¹⁷ See for instance Heslop, 'Production of *de luxe* manuscripts' who argues that such products, by monastic 'outworkers', were vital not only for embellishing monasteries but in the round of diplomatic gift-exchange, making 'the young interloper acceptable . . . on the international stage' (p. 180).

²¹⁸ For instance, there is little certain information about the Late Anglo-Saxon building phases of Benedictine monasteries in Eastern England. For the limited evidence see Irvine, 'Account of the discovery of part of the Saxon abbey church of Peterborough' and Gem and Keen, 'Late Anglo-Saxon finds from the site of St Edmund's abbey'.

deliberately used isolated locations to reassert the separation of monastic life. While many were established close to old administrative and power centres, their separation from them was a powerful visual display of spiritual ideals. The importance of creating this sacred landscape even appears on occasions to have structured the creation of appropriate origin stories. It is no surprise that the traditions that emerged, of earlier occupation on these spots, were hermitic; these were not only appropriate origin figures for such isolated locations but stressed the asceticism of the new monasticism.

That not all were so impressed by this spiritual viewpoint is suggested both by the tenth-century backlash against Benedictine foundations in Mercia, and by the lack of drive for their patronage in East Anglia. In the latter, the expression of religious devotion appears to have swung instead behind the foundation and endowment of seigneurial churches, often as co-operative ventures amongst the thegny class; it was this which led to the valuation of many in Domesday Book as a half or a third of a church.²¹⁹ While regional identity may have helped inhibit the Benedictine reform movement in East Anglia during the tenth century, there is little evidence for a lack of vibrancy in the spiritual life of the area. Indeed, there was a steady stream of endowments to Bury St Edmunds and healthy subsequent patronage of Holm St Benet's. Nevertheless, there was little drive towards the creation of further monasteries – only two small monastic cells were founded, both on the eve of the Conquest, at Rumburgh 1047×1064 and Clare 1044×1065. Notably, both had become hived off by the early twelfth century.²²⁰ Instead, in the same way that many English reform houses were created in a changed political landscape under King Edgar, a new wave of monastic foundations only occurred in East Anglia following an even more dramatic shift in the existing power structures following the Norman Conquest. It is the responses to these new political realities to which we must now turn our attention.

²¹⁹ Multiple ownership of churches is something of a feature in Little Domesday's entries, for instance Shotesham in Norfolk, which suggests the involvement of at least three parties. By 1086 Roger Bigod held half the church with fifteen acres valued at 15d, another quarter was held by Bury St Edmunds, while the remaining quarter is not listed: *LDB*, fols 175a and 210a. The will of Eadwine, c.1066, provides an extreme example of one person endowing many individual churches, with small parcels of land from his Norfolk estates, including ten acres each to Algarsthorpe, Little Melton, Bergh, Apton and Sparham churches, and four acres each to Holveston and Blyford churches. Despite this, he also made grants to Bury St Edmunds and Holm St Benet's: Whitelock (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, no. 33. More usually other wills show small-scale grants to one or two churches, as with the will of Ketel, 1052×1066, granting ten acres to Harting and Walsingham churches in Norfolk: *ibid.*, no. 34. The cumulative result of these endowments did much to create the landscape of medieval parochial churches in the region. For the foundation of churches at this time see also Blair, 'Local churches in Domesday' and 'Introduction: From minsters to parish churches', and Gem, 'English parish churches'.

²²⁰ Rumburgh is poorly documented in Domesday Book, forty acres of land in the holding of Count Alan being recorded as belonging to the church at Rumburgh: *LDB*, fol. 298a. Holm St Benet's records of the cell are equally poor, only a mention of the monk Blakere's establishment at the cell appearing in the St Benet's *Register*, written 1280–82: West (ed.), *St Benet of Holme 1020–1210*, i, no. 159 and ii, p. 179. Following the Conquest, the cell may have been dependent upon St Melaine, Rennes, before it was given to St Mary's, York, by Alan, earl of Richmond 1136×1145: Harper-Bill (ed.), *English Episcopal Acta VI: Norwich 1070–1214*, nos 51 and 52. Clare came to be refounded as a priory dependent upon Bec c.1090: Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses of England and Wales*, pp. 83 and 87.

The Establishment of Monasteries in the Norman Landscape

IF EVENTS in 1066 brought about a dramatic change in English political realities, the fallout was no less profound for communal religious life. The arrival of a Norman nobility saw the emergence of new political geographies and with it, the patronage of different forms of ordered religious communities. Monastic studies have frequently focused upon this post-Conquest period rather than its Anglo-Saxon precursor, both historically and archaeologically, primarily (one suspects) because of the substantially better array of evidence. This is both unfortunate and frustrating. It has led to monastic studies typically concentrating on individual religious orders, reforming movements, or house histories: the latter have often focused on economic or landholding issues guided by surviving house cartularies and account rolls. Only rarely have these topics been integrated within regional studies.¹ As a result, little attention is usually paid to tenurial patterns prevailing at the Conquest as a basis for understanding the subsequent evolution of monastic institutions. This is a surprising omission because frequently it can be shown that the establishment of new monasteries was structured or guided by a social landscape of estate ownership, power relations and belief inherited from the Anglo-Saxon period. This same landscape also requires re-examining for the ways in which topography and material culture inform us about attitudes to, and the construction of, monastic identities in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

THE RANGE OF THE SAMPLE

The documented foundation of so many monastic houses after 1066 gives a phenomenal potential array of data to be examined. 'Mainstream' monasticism diversified as reforming movements reinterpreted the monastic rule. Not only did various orders mutate out of the Benedictines, notably the Cluniacs, Carthusians, Savigniacs and Cistercians; older clerical communities became 'regularised' using the Augustinian Rule.² This Rule was also adapted by new Orders such as

¹ For a primarily historical example of a regional analysis see Burton, *The Monastic Order in Yorkshire 1069–1215*.

² For the emergence of these other orders from Benedictinism, the classic texts are Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England* and Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*. An alternative overview is Braunfels, *The Monasteries of Western Europe*. For the Cluniacs see Hunt, *Cluniac Monasticism in the Central Middle Ages* and Golding, 'Coming of the Cluniacs'. The Carthusians have most recently been

the Premonstratensians, Gilbertines and Canons of the Holy Sepulchre.³ Military orders like the Knights Templar and Hospitallers appeared, while caritative work was undertaken by a network of hospitals and leper houses.⁴ Numerous works have already charted these changes, and today there are no religious orders without at least some form of institutional history.

In response to these circumstances, an order has to be imposed on this study. For the religious life of the post-Conquest period, East Anglia can at last be defined more clearly, using the area of the Diocese of Norwich, which consisted of the modern counties of Norfolk and Suffolk, and a few parishes on the eastern edge of Cambridgeshire (Fig. 33). The continued patronage of religious life until the Dissolution also requires a chronological restriction and for present purposes this is set at c.1200. This end date allows consideration of those foundations datable only to the reign of Richard I (d.1199) as well as two others, Alnesbourne in Suffolk and Peterstone in Norfolk, founded c.1200.⁵ Ending at 1200 has another consequence, the omission of all mendicant houses, whose appearance in the thirteenth century brought about a whole new aspect to communal religious institutions and whose East Anglian foundations have recently been studied by Dr Lucy Vinten Mattich.⁶

One final issue remains to be addressed: which institutions will be considered 'monasteries' in the following analysis? The increasing diversity of religious orders reflects the different ways in which communal religious life could be led. One of the most visible developments in the period 1066–1200 was that of the hospital.⁷ Since monastic communities had a duty to provide charity, hospitals came to be intimately associated with them, as with St Peter's Hospital, founded

considered in Coppack and Aston, *Christ's Poor Men: The Carthusians in England*. For the Cistercians and Savigniacs there is a mountain of literature but see Bermann, *The Cistercian Evolution*, Robinson (ed.), *The Cistercian Abbeys of Britain* and Williams, *The Cistercians in the Early Middle Ages*. For the Augustinians see Dickinson, *The Origins of the Augustinian Canons and their Introduction into England*.

³ The Premonstratensians are discussed by Colvin, *The White Canons in England* and Gribbin, *The Premonstratensian Order in Late Medieval England*. For the Gilbertines see Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*. The canons of the Holy Sepulchre are poorly researched but for details of the order's existence see Gray, *Trinitarian Order in England*, pp. 9–10, and Daniel, *Order of the Holy Sepulchre in England*. Holy Sepulchre houses are listed under the Augustinian chapter in Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses of England and Wales*, pp. 137–82.

⁴ All of which are described by Gilchrist as 'the other monasticism': *Contemplation and Action. The Other Monasticism*. For hospitals and leper-houses see Satchell, 'The Emergence of Leper-houses in Medieval England 1100–1250'.

⁵ Docking in Norfolk had an alien Benedictine house, a potentially early foundation. Because its existence is first attested in 1415 and there is otherwise a total lack of evidence for either its date or institutional presence, it has been omitted from the sample. For the history of Docking see *VCH Norfolk*, ii, p. 462.

⁶ Vinten Mattich, 'Friars and Society in Late Medieval East Anglia'.

⁷ There is only limited evidence for Anglo-Saxon charitable concerns. One example is the will of Ætheling Æthelstan (1014×1015), who provided for 100 poor people to be fed on St Æthelthryth's feast day (23 June) each year: Whitelock (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, p. 59. An account in the 'List of Benefactors' preserved in a number of Bury St Edmunds cartularies records the confirmation of a gift of Melford 'for the use of the sick' by Wihtgar, son of Ælfric. The date of the grant is unclear but Melford was in the possession of Bury St Edmunds by 1066: *LDB*, fol. 359a. Wihtgar's father Ælfric made other grants to Bury 1044×1065: Hart, *Early Charters of Eastern England*, p. 71 and see Chapter 4, pp. 126–7.

Landscapes of Monastic Foundation

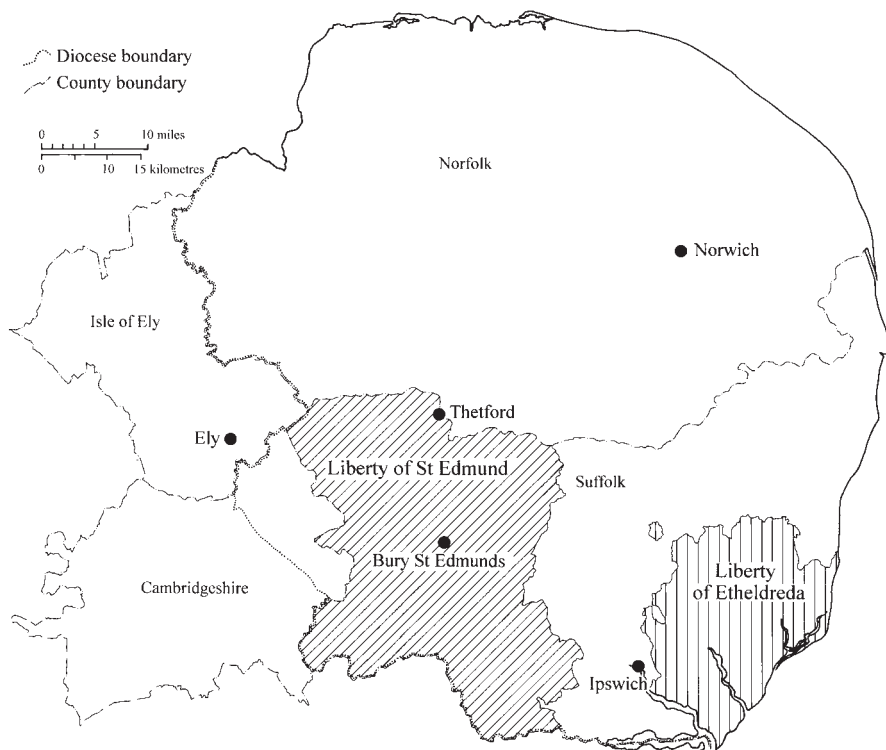


Fig. 33. The medieval diocese of Norwich showing also the abbatial liberties of St Edmund (Bury) and Etheldreda (Ely).

by Bury St Edmund's Abbey before 1135.⁸ Other examples show a blurring between the two types of institution. Hempton in Norfolk was first founded as a hospital by Roger de St Martin c.1100–35 but soon after its foundation, Richard Ward, its warden, became an Augustinian canon and the first prior.⁹ This illustrates the similarity between some hospitals, staffed by religious or semi-religious personnel, and other, monastic, communities. While acknowledging their importance as an additional dimension to spiritual life, hospitals will not be considered in the following analysis. Finally, the presence of Hospitaller and Templar preceptories raises other difficulties in the definition of what constituted a 'monastery'. Many acted essentially as granges – centres of production and collection – to support the orders in their primary aim of the defence of the Holy Land.¹⁰ Within these parameters, there is a body of some 71 monastic institutions founded between 1066 and c.1200; 38 in Norfolk, 31 in Suffolk and 2 in Cambridgeshire. The size of this sample, and its potential for wider application in understanding the religious and monastic life of medieval England, is attested by the fact that by

⁸ Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses of England and Wales*, pp. 316 and 349.

⁹ *VCH Norfolk*, ii, p. 381.

¹⁰ Gilchrist, *Contemplation and Action*, pp. 62–8.

1215 some 10% of all English religious houses were located within the diocese of Norwich.¹¹

THE REASONS FOR FOUNDING A MONASTERY

It is perhaps useful to consider briefly the processes involved in, and benefits behind, monastic foundations. While many of the desires are equally applicable to pre-Conquest England, the better survival of documentary evidence makes the motives behind foundation more easy to study in the Norman period.

It is clear that religious devotion and patronage were very personal issues, sometimes visibly unique to the individuals concerned. Usually it is impossible to provide specific explanations for patronage, although suggestions may be offered. For instance, the priory of the Holy Sepulchre, Thetford, was founded by William de Warenne III, 1139×1148.¹² This priory belonged to an independent order of Augustinian canons founded to look after the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and its patronage underlined the active crusading associations being forged by William, who took the cross at Vezelai on Palm Sunday, 24th March 1146.¹³ These crusading interests were perhaps also the motivation behind William's gifts to the Templars, for instance of 40s yearly from his rents of Lewes in Sussex.¹⁴

The inspirations for some other patrons have been preserved in house foundation accounts. That of Horsham St Faith in Norfolk is well known. The story tells how the priory's founders, Robert FitzWalter and his wife Sybil, were returning from a pilgrimage to Rome when they were set upon by robbers and imprisoned. Directing their prayers to God and St Faith, they were delivered, whereupon they visited the shrine of St Faith at Saint Foy, Conques en Rouergue. While there, they vowed to build a monastery on their return to England, which they did at Horsham, making it a cell of Conques.¹⁵ The veracity of the account is difficult to evaluate. The source is late, deriving from an 'ancient manuscript' made in 1598 in the possession of one Sampson Leonard which now appears to be lost.¹⁶ The foundation story certainly had an older origin, as wall paintings of c.1250 in the monastic refectory, now within a private house, depict the story in a series of panels below a twice-size crucifixion (Plate 8).¹⁷

¹¹ By 1215 there were 73 monastic houses representing approximately 10%. In 1066, there had been only 3.3% of the English total within the diocese: Harper-Bill, 'Searching for salvation', pp. 31–2. An alternative (and less trustworthy) estimate, including hospitals, friaries, colleges and the like, argues that 'the number of such institutions in this county [Norfolk] was 256 at the time of the Dissolution, nearly one eighth of the number in England and Wales': Mason, *History of Norfolk*, i, p. 384.

¹² For the dating parameters see below, n. 80.

¹³ Hare, 'Priory of the Holy Sepulchre, Thetford', p. 190.

¹⁴ 'Let all know that I, William earl of Warenne give to the brothers military of the temple of Solomon, once a year, forty shillings of my rents of Lewes, for the sake of my soul and [those] of my ancestors'. A edition of the original charter is printed in Clay (ed.), *Early Yorkshire Charters VIII*, no. 46.

¹⁵ Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, iii, p. 635.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* The story may perhaps have come from a cartulary, now untraced; one was in the hands of Sir John Hobart of Blickling from 1698: Davis, *Medieval Cartularies of Great Britain*, no. 495. Annals apparently written in the house (Cambridge, Trinity College MS 884) suggest a house history may also have been written at Horsham.

¹⁷ Alexander and Binski (eds), *The Age of Chivalry*, cat. no. 263; Purcell, 'Priory of Horsham St Faith';



Plate 8. Wallpainting of c.1250, selectively repainted in the fifteenth century, from the refectory of Horsham St Faith Priory, Norfolk, showing the foundation story of the monastery. This panel in the series depicts Robert and Sybil FitzWalter in Conques Abbey church pledging to found a monastery dedicated to St Faith on their return to England.

Unsurprisingly, the Horsham St Faith story gives a pious reason for the desire to found a monastery and it is at this level that much of the urge for spiritual patronage may be explained. Religion held a central place in people's lives and preparation for life after death gave good spiritual reason for founding a monastery.¹⁸

Primarily, the gifts made by benefactors were described in charters as alms (*elemosina*), or as gifts given in free alms.¹⁹ Since these benefactions were given to religious institutions embracing poverty, the bequest was a meritorious act in itself, bringing direct spiritual benefits. Secondly, gifts that supported the lives of religious personnel brought a founder into confraternity with their monastery. Because the most efficacious way to secure the salvation of one's soul was to follow the religious life, gifting alms to a monastery enabled a lay person, unwilling to give up the secular life, some share in the spiritual benefits enjoyed by a monk or canon.

Tristram, 'Wall paintings at Horsham St Faith'. Pevsner and Wilson, *Buildings of England Norfolk, 1: Norwich and North-East*, corrigendum to p. 567, describe the painting as 'the most impressive mid-thirteenth century scheme surviving in England'. See also Sherlock, 'Discoveries at Horsham St Faith Priory'.

¹⁸ Harper-Bill, 'Piety of the Anglo-Norman knightly class', pp. 63–4.

¹⁹ The subject of free alms has been more fully explored by Benjamin Thompson, mostly in the context of its development as a legal term, and the nature of services (in a feudal sense) that stemmed from the granting of alms: Thompson, 'From "alms" to "spiritual services" '; 'Monasteries and their patrons'; 'Free alms tenure'.

Monasteries in the Norman landscape

There were other important aspects to foundation. The grant of endowments to a monastic house, although made ‘in free alms’, nevertheless created a form of tenure between the founder or subsequent patron and the monastery. The grant of ‘alms’ gave the monastic inmates land (or other forms of endowment) in return for a service, usually expressed in charters as the good of the souls.²⁰ This tenurial bond was renewed by each subsequent lord or patron, even though the grant, by its very nature, could have no specific temporal limit.²¹

Nevertheless, beyond such spiritual dimensions, more earthly motivations clearly lay behind monastic patronage, particularly in terms of status and prestige. The wider implications of both form the focus of much of the rest of this chapter, as often the less spiritual motivations for patronage were enmeshed within the local geography of lordship and, in that, within specific topographical situations. The establishment of a religious community was something to be trumpeted and the act of foundation constituted a highly visible act with much potential for symbolic overtones. The grant of endowments, for instance, enabled the public reading, witnessing and sealing of charters.²² Such ceremonies not only signalled the pious generosity of the founder; they amounted to a form of conspicuous consumption, demonstrating the patron’s actual ownership and control of the land of which they were disposing.²³

Monastic foundation was therefore important for a variety of reasons. The spiritual benefits could be viewed, in modern parlance, as a long-term investment vehicle for those able to afford them. But monasteries also had a conceptual role, carrying out an alternative form of feudal duty. The monastery consequently provided protection for the souls of rich founding families, while acting as a symbol of this wealth, power and authority. In providing salvation with no temporally fixed limits, monasteries also served as a reminder of the permanence and position of the founding family within the social order. Together, these factors make it clear that the material culture, location and appearance of a religious house – indeed the very type of monastic community used – mediated important social as well as religious messages. It was the articulation of these messages that was instrumental in creating monastic landscapes.

A TEMPORAL ANALYSIS OF THE REGION’S FOUNDATIONS

It is clear that a considerable period of time could pass between the first intention to found, and the final introduction of a monastic community to buildings, marked by a number of stages. These included the selection of a suitable religious

²⁰ The phrase most commonly encountered in charters is *pro anima mea* as in, for example, Henry I’s grant of 1101, of Thorpe to Norwich Cathedral Priory: Saunders (ed.), *The First Register of Norwich Cathedral Priory*, pp. 30–1.

²¹ Thompson, ‘Free alms tenure’, pp. 222–3.

²² The foundation charter of Binham Priory in Norfolk c.1104 takes this to an extreme, being witnessed by no fewer than sixty-nine individuals – *et aliis*! The charter is printed in Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, iii, pp. 345–6.

²³ Greenway, ‘Conquest and colonization’, pp. 53–4. The increasing use of spiritualities as an endowment source is discussed by Harper-Bill, ‘Struggle for benefices’.

order, the assembly of religious personnel to staff the nascent community, the selection of a site, the construction of buildings and the creation of an endowment confirmed by grants witnessed in charters. Finally, the monastic church itself required dedication, although in some cases this might happen some time later.²⁴ As an example, at Butley Priory in Suffolk the journey from conception to consecration took fourteen years.²⁵

Foundation could, therefore, be a drawn-out process and marked a major commitment on the part of the patron in which the documentary evidence for most or all of the stages no longer survives. Indeed, it is often difficult to assign a date of foundation. In many cases, the evidence of a 'foundation' charter is also likely to be misleading, such endowments frequently being documented some time after the actual foundation had taken place.²⁶ With these caveats in mind, we may attempt to analyse the way monasteries emerged in the East Anglian landscape in the years 1066–1200.

We will start by looking at the complete sample of 71 monasteries arranged, so far as is possible, in their order of foundation (Fig. 34). Of the 71 houses, nine are datable only to the time of the king in whose reign they were established. A further two have date spans of fifteen years or more (Yarmouth eighteen years; West Acre twenty-four). Clearly, this obscures a consideration of the sequence in which houses were founded, and with it changes in the patronage of certain religious orders.

Notwithstanding such problems, the picture of monastic patronage is broadly in harmony with many other parts of England.²⁷ In the first half-century after the Conquest, Benedictine foundations dominated, with an admixture of Cluniac and Augustinian houses. The crucial exception came with the rise of the Cistercian movement which, with the solitary exception of Sibton in Suffolk, founded c.1150, was entirely absent from East Anglia.²⁸ The next nearest Cistercian houses were Warden (Beds.) founded 1136, Coggeshall in Essex, founded 1140, and Sawtry (Hunts.) founded 1147. Their absence from East Anglia is marked (Fig. 35). The Order had undergone rapid growth on its arrival from the Continent with the foundation of Waverley Abbey in 1128, and by 1154 it had over fifty

²⁴ The Latin words *consecrare* and *dedicare* are used almost interchangeably at this time, and so can obscure different processes. At Norwich Cathedral, for instance, Herbert de Losinga 'consecrated' his church in 1101 (*constitui et consecrare*), but only in the sense of dedicating the institution: Saunders (ed.), *The First Register of Norwich Cathedral Priory*, p. 34. The actual consecration was not to take place for another 177 years: Fernie, *An Architectural History of Norwich Cathedral Priory*, p. 14. It was uncertain in the medieval period whether Bury St Edmunds' abbey church had even been consecrated at all: Gransden, 'Question of the consecration'. Likewise, Domesday Book records that the Hundred of Stow in Suffolk did not know whether a chapel of Thorney church had ever been consecrated: *LDB*, fol. 281b.

²⁵ Butley's traditional foundation date is 1171, but its foundation charter was only given before 1174; the church was dedicated on 24 September 1188: Mortimer (ed.), *Leiston Abbey Cartulary and Butley Priory Charters*, p. 1.

²⁶ Galbraith, 'Monastic foundation charters', p. 214. For more general consideration of the difficulties in dating charters see Chibnall, 'Dating charters of smaller religious houses'.

²⁷ For a comparison see Morris, *Cathedrals and Abbeys of England and Wales 600–1540*, p. 179 and fig. 10.

²⁸ Subsequently, a house of Cistercian nuns was founded at Marham in 1249, but this lies beyond the dating parameters of this present analysis.

Monasteries in the Norman landscape

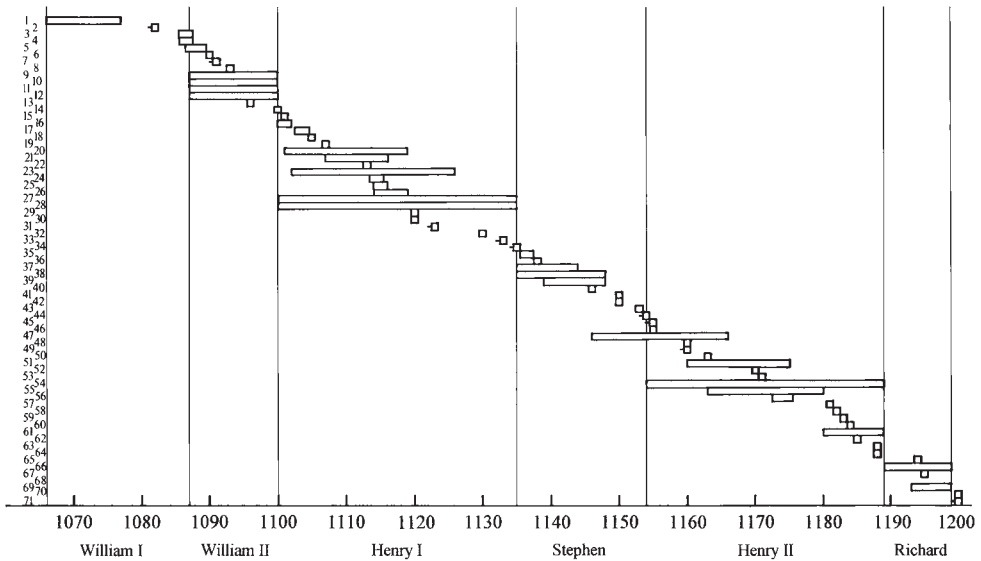


Fig. 34. The monasteries of East Anglia arranged according to foundation date. The monastery represented by each number in the left-hand column is shown in Table 3.

houses in 'the greatest, most adventurous monastic movement ever witnessed on these shores'.²⁹

How could East Anglia so spectacularly miss this wave of foundation? One answer is that the Cistercians' desire for large desolate spaces to exploit led them away from the region where such conditions were at a premium due to the pressure on land.³⁰ This is possible, but there are likely to be other factors. It is clear, for instance, that even by 1154 there were still many sites left in East Anglia where Cistercian foundations could have been made (see below, pp. 165–7 and Fig. 39c). Moreover, the Fenland of west Norfolk and north-west Suffolk would have provided ideal 'desolate' landscapes to be exploited. In fact, a number of reasonably wealthy monasteries were subsequently to be founded in precisely these areas (for instance at West Dereham in Norfolk). Sibton was not in an especially inhospitable location and was in an area later colonised by several other houses, for instance Leiston and Butley. Indeed, the emphasis on desolate locations has led to the suggestion that Cistercian houses were cheap foundations, often being on the types of sites unwanted by patrons. Furthermore, Donkin has shown that few Cistercian houses were truly remote.³¹ Despite the persistent image of powerful houses like Fountains or Rievaulx, there were also many poor Cistercian houses; of Waverley's twelve daughter houses 'few achieved any but local celebrity'.³² Finally, familial and tenorial connexions lay behind the patronage of many houses and any subsequent monastic cells. It may be that there

²⁹ Burton, 'Foundation of the British Cistercian houses', p. 24.

³⁰ As suggested by Gilchrist, 'Religious houses of medieval Norfolk', p. 38.

³¹ Donkin, *The Cistercians. Studies in the Geography of Medieval England and Wales*, pp. 103–20.

³² Burton, 'Foundation of the British Cistercian houses', p. 29.

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Fig. 35. The distribution of Cistercian monasteries in England.

was an unwillingness among influential figures to found Cistercian abbeys in East Anglia in the critical twenty-six years of 1128–54, when most of the order's houses were established. This may be the reason that only Sibton came to be located in the region. While the type of land the Cistercians are portrayed as wanting for their endowments may have been a prominent factor behind their absence in East Anglia, it was clearly not the only one.

Examining the temporal evolution of the region's monasteries can be made in two ways. First, we can study the rate of foundation, and second, the progress of various orders. The most notable feature is perhaps the regularity with which new foundations appeared. While Fig. 34 shows the timespans involved in dating each monastery's foundation and the advance of certain religious orders, an alternative method of illustrating foundation is displayed in Fig. 36. Here, the monastic houses are again listed in order of foundation, but those houses whose date of foundation is uncertain are given a central date derived from their widest dating parameters. This has re-ordered the list and shows the overall consistency in the foundation rate of religious establishments through the eleventh and twelfth centuries. For instance, the first monastic foundation was made 1066×1077 at Welle, but the creation of a mean date leads to its foundation date being shown as 1071.5. The graph shows that in the 134 years of 1066–1200, one monastery was founded every one year and eleven months. If a start date for all foundations begins with the earliest establishment, then after Welle was founded in 1071, a monastery was founded on average every twenty months.

Clearly, averaging out the date ranges of a foundation to a median point serves also to average out any spurts or gaps in the overall rate of monastic patronage. However, 50 of the 71 monasteries in the sample have a date of foundation spanning no more than three years, meaning that the bulk of houses' origins may be plotted with a fair degree of accuracy. Examining the cumulative total of religious houses demonstrates the overall consistency with which such foundations were being made (Fig. 36). The pace of foundation falls behind the overall average rate of one every year and eleven months from the time of the Conquest to the middle of Henry I's reign. This is perhaps explicable in the aftermath of the Conquest, which saw a ruling elite not yet secure in tenure, still suppressing revolts and thus not yet concentrating their resources fully on religious patronage.

William Rufus' reign saw a dramatic increase in foundations, although the weighting of when this occurred – in a bulge or consistently over time – is unclear; five houses are datable only to the length of the reign. This above average increase in the foundation rate continued in the reign of Henry I, to the extent that the rate, especially in the first half of his reign, catches up to hit the average line. From this high, the second half of Henry's reign saw a decline that was to continue through Stephen's reign until the early years of Henry II. Interestingly, the number of new foundations remained both even and consistent for the first half of Stephen's reign, despite the turmoil of the 'Anarchy'. However, the drop-off that is seen towards the end of his reign and into the early years of Henry II's reign may indicate the effects of this disturbance: since religious houses actually took a number of years to establish, the undisturbed pattern seen at the start of Stephen's reign may relate to those monasteries whose foundation had already

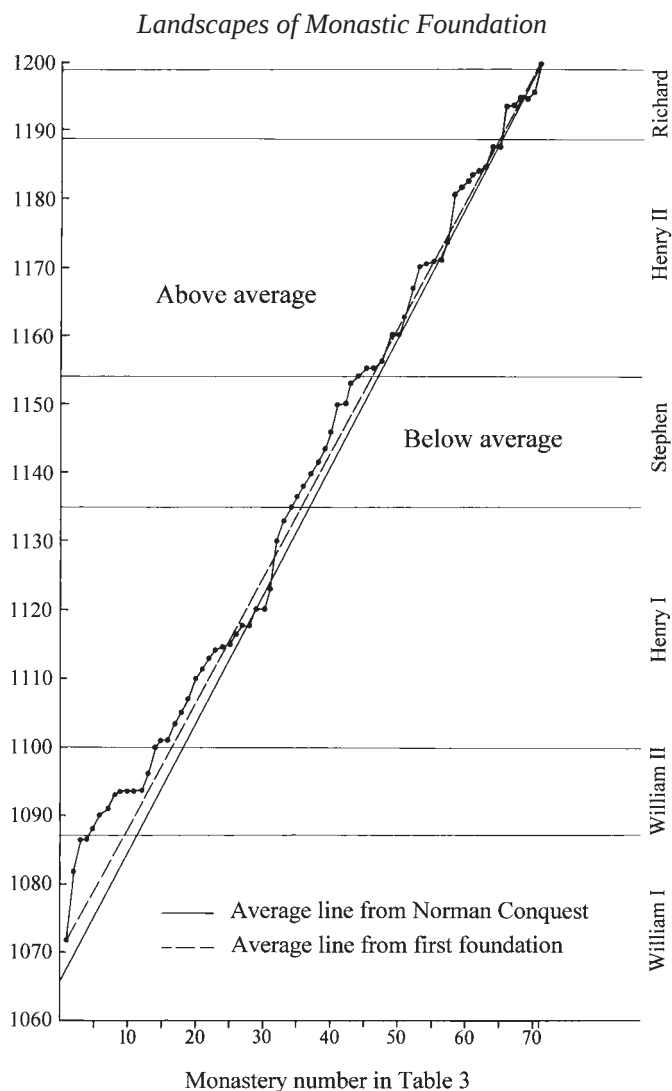


Fig. 36. The rates of monastic foundation over time in the diocese of Norwich 1066–c.1200.

been initiated. The effect of this time lag did not fully work its way through until several years into Henry II's reign when a spurt of new houses, notably around 1170, returned the rate of foundation back to the overall average.

One further point to note is the fluctuation in foundation in the latter half of Henry II's and the early part of Richard I's reigns. This seems to show a near ten-year hiatus between the foundation of new monastic houses in the diocese for reasons that are not immediately apparent. This may well be due to the crude nature of the graph itself; the twelfth century brings a higher number of houses whose date of foundation is known more accurately, which may illustrate better the bursts in monastic patronage that do seem to have occurred (as c.1170). More

generally, it is enough to note the overall consistency in foundation over time from the appearance of the first houses. Of equal interest is the way in which these foundations were located within the region.

SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION

To discuss the spatial distribution of the seventy-one monasteries founded between the Conquest and c.1200, recourse must again be made to topographical considerations. While monasteries were self-contained religious units, their success depended upon an economic base, most usually the endowments made at their foundation. While these typically included spiritualities, more important was the size of land grants made, since a monastery's well-being was often reliant on an ability to exploit local resources successfully. Thus, any foundation endowment was dependent upon a patron's resources and generosity. The founder's preferred choice of land to grant out was therefore likely to relate to the general location of the monastery. The distribution of East Anglian monasteries, as it existed by 1200, is consequently striking, with a dense concentration of houses to the west of Norfolk and along the east coast of Suffolk (Fig. 37), rather than a more even scatter which, all things being equal, might have been expected. This pattern is not the result of chance, but finds echoes in several other distributions.

The first of these is in the soils and *pays* of the region (Fig. 3). In Norfolk in particular, the monastic pattern bears a close resemblance to the division of the county by the central watershed, on which only Sporle and Carbrooke stand. To the west, the majority of monastic houses were, by 1200, not only quite tightly packed together, but shared the soils of the Good Sands region and the fringes of the western escarpment on the edge of the Fens. To the east, by contrast, the monasteries were far more spread out, showing a basic association with the mixed loamy soils of north-east Norfolk and avoiding the claylands. In Suffolk, too, the general distribution of monasteries echoes these preferences, the principal exceptions being the string of monasteries based around Hoxne, Eye and Mendham. Indeed, excluding Thetford, the monasteries were essentially founded away from the Breckland, being sited instead in the landscapes of the Good Sands and Sandlings where sandy land with interfluves gives way to marsh and clay, increasing the diversity of available land types. It would, though, be wrong to take a strict environmentally deterministic approach to the siting of monasteries. Instead, we need to examine the ways in which the environmental aspect feeds into the social landscape.

Social implications of land type present themselves most obviously in terms of land ownership and lordship. This can be seen in a number of ways.³³ The tenurial organisation of East Anglia at the Conquest has always been a confusing and contentious subject, because the compilers of Domesday Book were not

³³ Conveniently defined in recent maps: Wade-Martins (ed.), *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk*, and Dymond and Martin (eds), *An Historical Atlas of Suffolk*.

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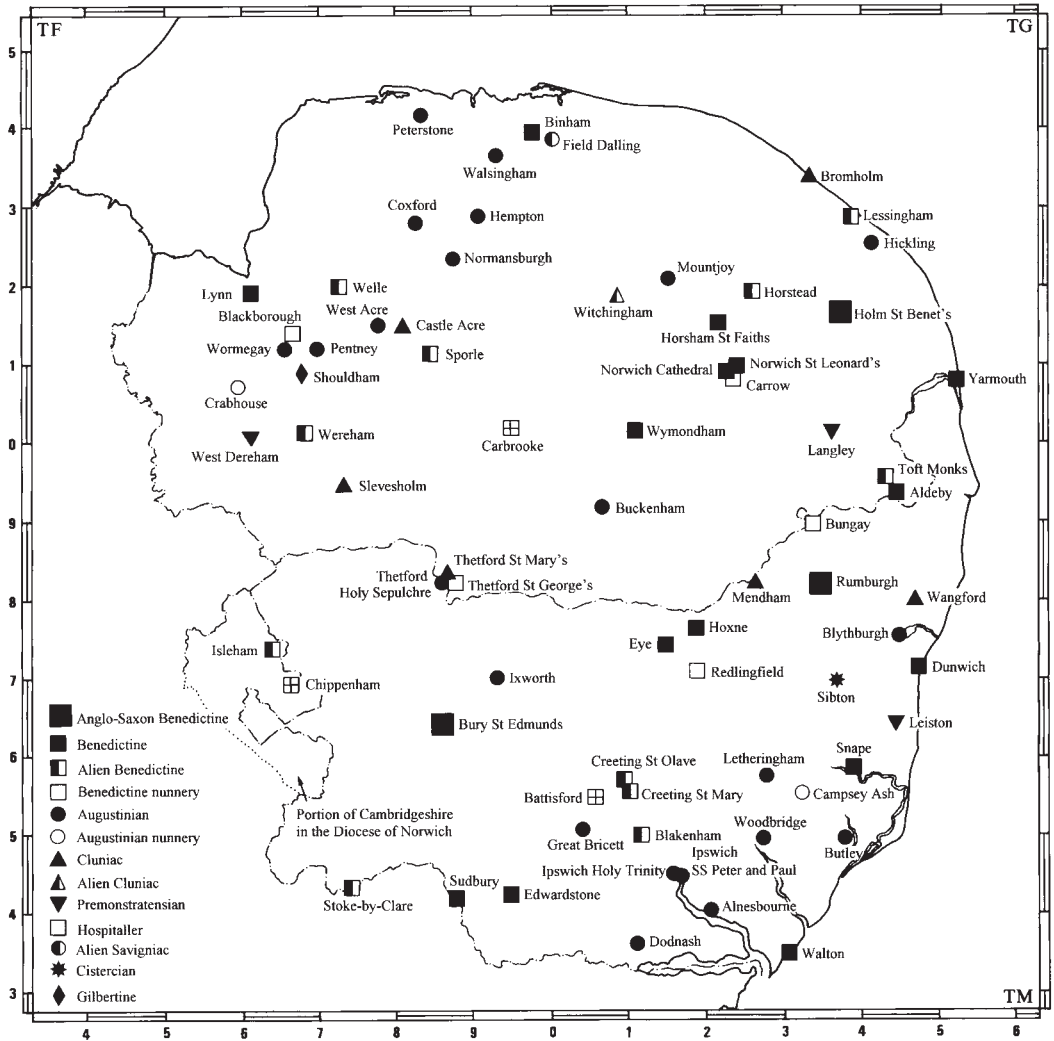


Fig. 37. Monastic foundations in the diocese of Norwich 1066–c.1200.

interested in making a population census but in establishing liability for taxation. One difficulty is the difference between sokemen (*sochemanni*) and free men (*liberi homines*), the ‘middle class society’ described by Welldon Finn,³⁴ who held land of their lords, but were not listed by Domesday as chattels of their manor. Their landholdings could vary considerably. At Castle Rising one sokeman held sixty acres with twenty-six bordars on the land, while in nearby Hillington a free man held only two and a half acres.³⁵ Although historically there seem to have been differences between the two, perhaps principally in status, there were many similarities.

³⁴ Welldon Finn, *Domesday Studies: The Eastern Counties*.

³⁵ *LDB*, fols 142b and 245b.

Monasteries in the Norman landscape

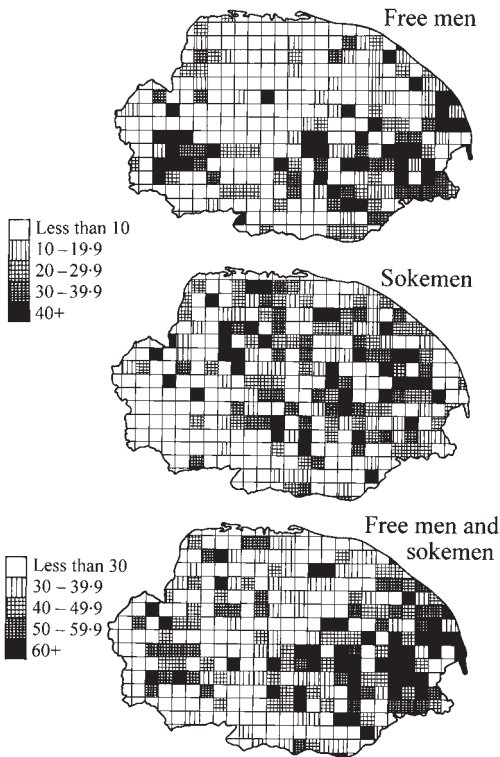


Fig. 38. The distribution of free men and sokemen in Norfolk in 1066 from Domesday Book, shown as a percentage of the recorded population per grid square (after Wade-Martins (ed.), *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk*, no. 15).

At issue is the ability of this class of society to buy and sell land. It is clear that in many cases they were indeed able to, and this holding of free land led to a situation in which estates might be fragmented by partible inheritance.³⁶ Consequently, certain lands may have been less favourable for providing a monastic endowment. This seems affirmed by the distribution of free men and sokemen that emerges from Domesday Book (Fig. 38); while sokemen were spread over much of Norfolk by 1066, the pattern of free men was much more limited to the south and east with a small spread in the south-west. Combining the figures reinforces the pattern, showing the bulk to occupy the fertile south-east of the county. This may indicate the free men exploited areas more peripheral to the residences of larger landowners, such as the fen edges or clayland interfluvies, which they were able to maintain or enhance their possession of. The sokemen perhaps predominated more in areas with greater lordly power.³⁷ In a similar vein, there is a noticeable concentration in overall population to the north-east and south-east of Suffolk.³⁸

These patterns may be applied to the distribution of religious houses, which correlate well with Domesday, in particular between the location of free men and

³⁶ For the purchase of land see Welldon Finn, *Domesday Studies: The Eastern Counties*, pp. 126–7. For the fragmentation of estates see Skipper and Williamson, 'Late Saxon social structure' in Wade-Martins (ed.), *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk*, pp. 40–1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Hill, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England*, nos 25 and 26.

Landscapes of Monastic Foundation

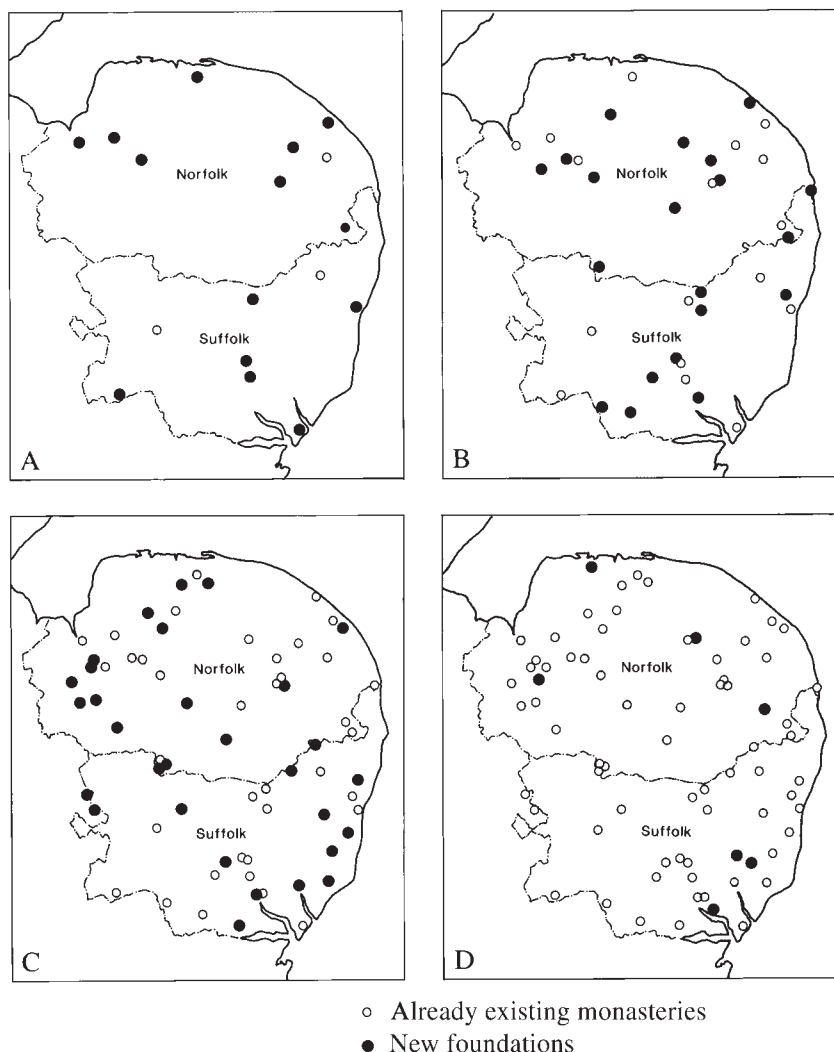


Fig. 39. The evolution of monastic settlement in East Anglia by reign:
(A) Williams I and II (1066–1100), (B) Henry I (1100–1135), (C) Stephen and Henry II (1135–1189), (D) Richard I (1189–1199).

monasteries. This is especially true in the earliest period of settlement. Fig. 39a shows the distribution of monasteries in 1066–1100 (i.e. to the death of William Rufus).³⁹ Although settlement in the diocese was still sparse, with many foundations being small alien cells, the distribution was more or less even to east and west with Binham on its own to the north. The ‘pattern’ bears little resemblance to the picture provided by the distribution of sokemen. Again, in the next

³⁹ The division of monastic foundation by reign, as shown in Fig. 36, is necessarily crude as the number of years represented in each map differs. However, several houses can only be dated to the reign of a particular monarch, hence the uneven date-spans per distribution map.

thirty-five years (1100–35), that is, the reign of Henry I, foundations in Norfolk were more or less even to the west and east of the county (Fig. 39b). With the exception of Thetford,⁴⁰ all avoided the bottom third of the county, an area (broadly speaking) encompassing the Breckland and claylands, in which free men predominated. The fifty-four years of the reigns of Stephen (1135–54) and Henry II (1154–89) continued to see foundations being made, the most important aspect of which was the reinforcement of a pattern to the east and west, avoiding the county's central watershed (Fig. 39c). Finally, by c.1200 the distribution was complete (Fig. 39d). The emphasis on the western side of the county is most striking, not so much in overall totals (twenty-one houses to the west compared to sixteen to the east, excluding Carbrooke), but in the close proximity of many to one another. Again, a correlation with the tenurial patterns seems insistent when the figures for free men and sokemen are taken together. Free men clearly concentrate in the south-east of Norfolk, an area with few monastic foundations; indeed, within this area only the Premonstratensian house at Langley (founded 1195) stands out, being neither urban (as with nearby Yarmouth and Norwich) nor a very small cell (as at Aldeby and Toft Monks). The implication is that the distribution of free men especially, but also of both free men and sokemen, in Norfolk at least, had an influence upon where a founder might choose or, perhaps more likely, was most *able* to provide land of suitable size and tenurial control to make an acceptable foundation endowment. This situation is reinforced if the wealth of the monasteries, based on the 1291 *Taxatio Ecclesiastica*, is examined (Fig. 40).⁴¹ Ignoring the diocesan foundation of Norwich, examination shows that the west, an area of stronger lordship, has the richer post-Conquest monasteries – with six valued at over £100 compared to three in the east, one of which (Holm St Benet's) was of course a royal and much longer-established, Anglo-Saxon, foundation.

If these distributions stand out, especially the numbers of free men, this is further emphasised by looking at the situation from the other end of the timescale. Bruce Campbell's analysis of medieval manorial structure, building upon the work of Blake, used the *Nomina Villarum* of 1316 to form an impression of existing manorial arrangements.⁴² The *Nomina Villarum* comprises a list of the townships within each hundred, and the name of their lords. It shows that the complex lordship attested in Domesday was maintained into the early fourteenth century, and that of the 695 townships listed in the county, only 163 (or 23%) were held by a single head lord, the rest being divided among several

⁴⁰ The particular situation regarding the location of St Mary's Priory, Thetford, is more complex; see pp. 190–1 below.

⁴¹ This Ecclesiastical Taxation was granted by Pope Nicholas IV in 1291 to Edward I, to fund his planned Crusade to the Holy Land. There are difficulties in interpreting this taxation assessment (for which see Denton, 'Valuation of the ecclesiastical benefices') but I have used the *Taxatio* as it is nearer to the time of the foundations under discussion rather than the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* of 1535, which itself has some discrepancies in values.

⁴² Campbell, 'Complexity of manorial structure'; Blake, 'Norfolk manorial lords'. The *Nomina Villarum* is the first detailed opportunity in Norfolk after Domesday Book to look at manorial structure because of the general absence of the Hundred Rolls which survive for parts of Suffolk and Cambridgeshire.

Landscapes of Monastic Foundation

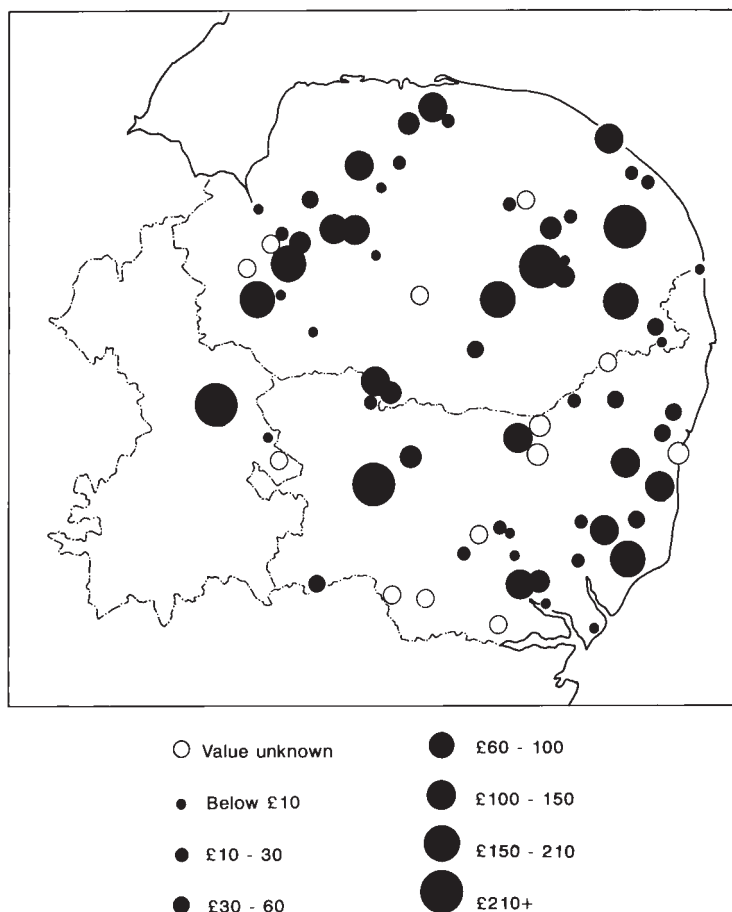


Fig. 40. The values of monasteries in the diocese of Norwich recorded in the 1291 *Taxatio Ecclesiastica*.

lords.⁴³ Campbell's tabulation of this shows how the west of the county, heavily settled by monastic houses, corresponds to an area with low numbers of lordships, usually of high value. While the scattering of monasteries to the east is in an area with generally lower, less valuable, lordships, even so a number fit into pockets there of richer and fewer lordships (Fig. 41).⁴⁴ Some caution needs to be exercised. For instance, it could be argued that by the 1316 *Nomina Villarum*, the presence of so many religious houses may have contributed to these greater numbers of single lordships, each monastery acting as a lord, these institutions' stability being less liable to break down ownership.⁴⁵ It remains the case that the monastic houses are largely grouped within existing single lordship areas rather

⁴³ Blake, 'Norfolk manorial lords', p. 236.

⁴⁴ Campbell, 'Complexity of manorial structure', p. 230 map 1D; Campbell, 'Medieval manorial structure' in Wade-Martins (ed.), *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk*, pp. 52-3.

⁴⁵ Similarly, Hassall and Beauroy (eds), *Lordship and Landscape in Norfolk 1250-1350*, p. 26 have

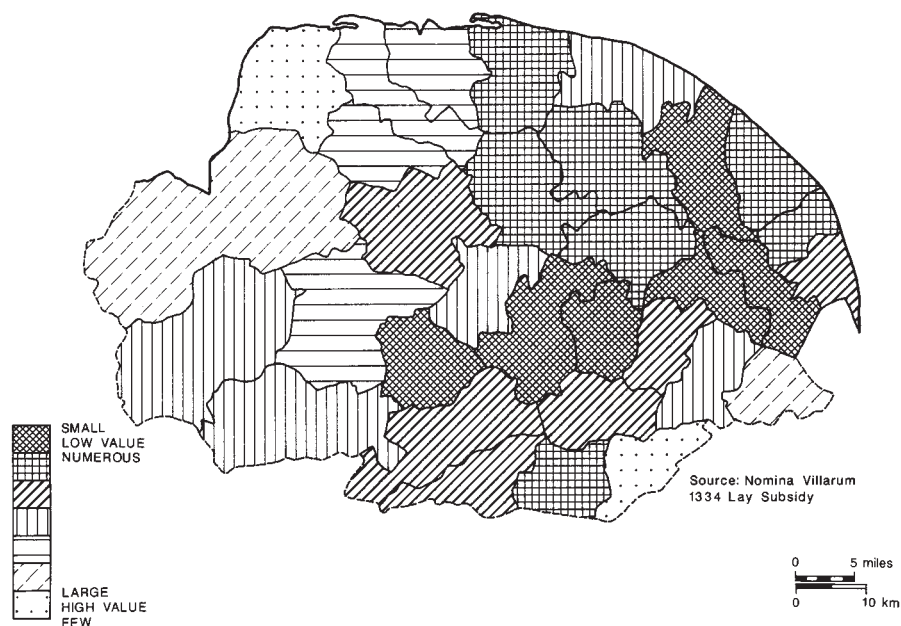


Fig. 41. The distribution of single lordships in Norfolk c.1316 (after Wade-Martins (ed.), *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk*, no. 21).

than leading a trend towards this pattern. Moreover, this context of strong lordship can be seen to exist at Domesday, before the foundation of these monasteries.

There has been no comparable work to reveal the situation in Suffolk, but the instances from Norfolk, at both ends of the period in question, plainly show how successful monastic endowments were likely to relate to the type of control that could be exerted over the land. In this way, it was clear that the topographical requirements or desires of a community were at once restricted by the ability of founders to provide the type and extent of land required.

In these instances, the influence of soils and topography is evident. However, the siting of monasteries in Suffolk shows one further, social, factor within the distribution patterns: there was a noticeable absence of houses in west Suffolk, which was filled at its centre by the vast and rich abbey of Bury St Edmunds. The influences seen in Norfolk over distribution, for example soil type, probably also played their part in minimising the exploitation of this area for religious houses. However, the size of the gap must surely be explained by Bury creating for itself a sphere of influence, within which the development of rivals was retarded. It has been suggested that this picture is strengthened when the relocation of Clare Priory to Stoke in 1124, and the transfer of the Cluniac community in Thetford from the Suffolk to Norfolk side of the river, is considered.⁴⁶ We may, I think, disregard this observation for a number of reasons.

recently argued that a copy of a Hundred Roll return of 1279–80 shows complex manorial structures existing in the Holkham/Burnham area of west Norfolk.

⁴⁶ Northeast, 'Religious houses' in Dymond and Martin (eds), *An Historical Atlas of Suffolk*, pp. 70–1.

First, the removal to Stoke was a common pattern for monastic communities founded in the shadow of a castle (as also happened at Castle Acre in Norfolk and Walton in Suffolk).⁴⁷ Second, the situation took the community scarcely much further away from Bury. The situation at Thetford was more complex, the Cluniac priory there being neither owned by Bury, nor in its Liberty. Its location apparently related more to its urban position and the motives of its founder, Roger Bigod.⁴⁸ Similarly, while the Cluniac priory moved north across the river, there appear to have been few problems with Holy Sepulchre Priory's foundation on the south, Suffolk, side of the border. Of more significance are two other houses far closer to Bury, the Augustinian communities at Chipley (founded some time before 1235 and not considered further here) and Ixworth, founded in 1170 and only six miles to the north-east of Bury;⁴⁹ the next nearest monasteries were those in Thetford, some twelve miles away.

The means by which Bury may have been able to exert an influence over new foundations is unclear but was probably a combination of factors. The abbey held a number of lordships in the area around the priory, reducing the available landholdings for other potential founders; similarly, the sheer prestige of the abbey must have attracted the sort of donations that might otherwise have led to small foundations elsewhere. Potential monastic patrons may also have been discouraged from founding houses within St Edmund's Liberty by the abbot of Bury. The foundation of Babwell Friary provides a case in point. Both the Dominicans and Franciscans obtained a bull from Pope Alexander IV in 1257, allowing them to establish houses in Bury. The Franciscans proceeded but the monks expelled them with violence, twice, and when allowed to build in 1258 under Henry III's protection, their new house lasted only six years until the new Pope, Urban IV, reversed his predecessors' bull, and the friary was torn down. The Franciscans finally settled at Babwell, just beyond the abbey's *banleuca* or administrative area, in 1263.⁵⁰

The picture which emerges from East Anglia is that the overall context of the land, including its tenurial patterns, appears to have had as important a role in the distribution of monasteries in East Anglia as purely social reasons, such as the desire for certain types of location, or the ability of founding families to provide them. The most crucial feature of this distribution is the watershed that snakes down through Norfolk and across Suffolk. While only ever a limited barrier to communication, as a division between land types and their exploitation it constituted a very real partition in the distribution of monastic houses. More specific reasons for a house's location must be sought by reference to the actual founders and their motives in establishing monastic communities.

⁴⁷ For further discussion of this phenomenon see below, pp. 199–200.

⁴⁸ For which see below, pp. 190–1, and Pestell, 'Monastic foundation strategies', pp. 224–9.

⁴⁹ Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, vi (1), p. 589, gives no dating evidence for the foundation of Chipley, while suggesting that Ixworth was founded c.1100 before being restored, after its destruction in war, by William Blunt, son of Gilbert the original founder (*ibid.*, p. 311). This account is preserved in a manuscript of uncertain date whose *raison d'être* was in fact the recording of the Blunt family pedigree. It is therefore of uncertain authority for the foundation of the priory.

⁵⁰ *VCH Suffolk*, ii, pp. 124–5.

ALIEN HOUSES

The presence of 'alien' priories in England is a feature of the first wave of pious foundation in the wake of the Conquest. The definition of an alien house was only made later in the middle ages, in referring to those monastic institutions that were owned by, or owed allegiance to, houses sited on the Continent. While English lands freshly gained by conquest tended to be viewed by their owners as additions to existing estates based in Normandy, this did not necessarily mean that all the monastic mother houses were Norman. Several lay beyond the frontiers of the duchy, and in these instances the motivation for such foundations or grants can be difficult to understand unless there is wider background evidence for the circumstances behind particular patronage.⁵¹

The alien monasteries provide certain challenges in definition. On the one hand, houses such as Castle Acre and Thetford must be described as 'alien' since, as Cluniac cells, they owed allegiance to a Continental house (Castle Acre to Lewes, a daughter of Cluny; Thetford directly to Cluny). They were, though, fundamentally different in size and operation from other alien foundations like Lessingham in Norfolk or Creeting St Olave in Suffolk. Both have few records relating to them and it is questionable how they should be regarded. As an example, Lessingham is often referred to as a priory. In fact, there is no evidence here for a foundation as such, and there are no written records for the 'house'. Instead, the lordship and advowson of the rectory were given by Gerard de Gurney to the abbey of Bec in Normandy in the time of William Rufus (1087–1100), before becoming subject to Bec's foremost English cell, Ogbourne Priory in Wiltshire.⁵² When suppressed in 1415 with the other alien priories it was described as a manor, 'parcel of the priory of Ockebourne', the lands then passing to King's College, Cambridge by gift of Edward IV in 1462.⁵³ As a result of King's College's ownership, a map of Lessingham by John Goodwin, made 1584–7, still survives.⁵⁴ This, and the later 1840 Tithe Award map,⁵⁵ has no description of fields with priory names attached, as is often the case on other monastic sites. The church is isolated from the modern village and has no evidence of ever having had even a small cell attached to it. Instead, the Tithe Award map shows a near-rectangular 28-acre block of land which belongs to King's College, today known as College Farm.⁵⁶ Given the small scale of the 'endowment' and the very early date of the grant, this was almost certainly never a fully constituted priory and was probably never intended to be one, but was simply granted as an endowment for Bec. The very early date of the grant

⁵¹ Martindale, 'Monasteries and castles', pp. 136–7.

⁵² Blomefield and Parkin, *An Essay Towards a Topographical History of Norfolk*, ix, p. 328.

⁵³ CPR 1461–7, p. 74.

⁵⁴ King's College Cambridge Muniments, in Survey Book pressmarked P34, now COLL ARC LES/35. See also Eden, 'Land surveyors in Norfolk', p. 477 and n. 26.

⁵⁵ NRO, DN/TA 455.

⁵⁶ This block is a result of Parliamentary enclosure in the parish rather than relating directly to the cell's ancient endowment.

supports this, other foundations made at this date tending to be large; in the time of William Rufus (1087–1100) for instance, the substantial Benedictine monasteries of Bingham (by 1093), Norwich Cathedral Priory (1096), Wymondham (1107), and Castle Acre (1087×1089) were founded.

This early period appeared to see a range of monasteries in terms of type and wealth. In fact, the contrasts between the types of foundations made at this time are very sharp, as highlighted in the valuations of the 1291 *Taxatio Ecclesiastica*. Several of the land grants made to alien priories within the first thirty years of the Conquest were not inconsiderable when judged against later monasteries. For instance, Toft Monks (cell to the abbey of St Pierre Préaux in Normandy) had a valuation of £40 16s 10½d, contrasting with the later foundations at Mendham (Cluniac, by 1155), valued at £19 18s 6½d and Hickling (Augustinian, 1185), valued at £15 12s 9d.⁵⁷ However, the sites of these early grants have little or no evidence for any monastic settlement, in contrast to those later monasteries like Hickling and Mendham, with abundant physical and documentary evidence. The only real exception to this among the poor alien houses is Wereham, where the remains of a fine Romanesque building of c.1120–40 survive (Fig. 42).⁵⁸ This has been interpreted variously, but is in form a chapel rather than a monastic church.

The conflict between these two contrasting pictures of a monastic cell are well summed up in Wereham's history. A confirmation by Pope Anastasius IV shows an initial grant had been made by 1154, although the earliest charter of the house dates from 1199.⁵⁹ Wereham's revenues were always slight, amounting to only £7 2s 8d in the 1291 *Taxatio Ecclesiastica*.⁶⁰ Despite the input of resources into the construction of the chapel and therefore probably also ancillary buildings, the community was probably considered surplus to requirements by the mother house of St Salvins, Monsterey, who sold the priory to Hugh Scarlet of Lincoln in 1321.⁶¹ Clearly, most of these small alien cells were no more than outposts of the mother house, administering grants of land, and acting as granges. Field Dalling in Norfolk, for instance, was so small that it was most often seen as a parcel of Long Bennington (Lincs.), itself a cell of Savigny.⁶² Likewise, the manor of Blakenham in Suffolk was given to the monastery of Bec c.1091 at first under the charge of the prior of Ruislip (Middlesex), another cell of Bec; as late as 1325 the manor was held by the prior of Ogbourne.⁶³ The underlying point is clear: while small, the donations were sufficient to require immediate administration, most

⁵⁷ For convenience I have used the total valuations provided in individual entries in the relevant *VCH* entries, which are derived from Astle *et al.* (eds), *Taxatio Ecclesiastica Angliae et Walliae*. Thus, Toft Monks and Hickling: *VCH Norfolk*, ii, pp. 464 and 384. For Mendham see *VCH Suffolk*, ii, p. 87.

⁵⁸ Impey, 'Winwall house', forthcoming. The Norfolk SMR (no. 3033) also has a record of some remains at Witchingham found in 1935, consisting of a buttressed structure floored with tiles. Because the cell was dissolved in 1414, the remains (which are undated) may not relate to the monastic cell.

⁵⁹ Preserved in NRO, Hare MS 3863 and published by Dashwood (ed.), 'A note of some early deeds', pp. 297–8.

⁶⁰ *VCH Norfolk*, ii, p. 465.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 465–6.

⁶² Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses of England and Wales*, p. 130.

⁶³ For the date of Blakenham see Davis *et al.* (eds), *Regesta Regum*, i, no. 320 and *VCH Suffolk*, ii, p. 153.

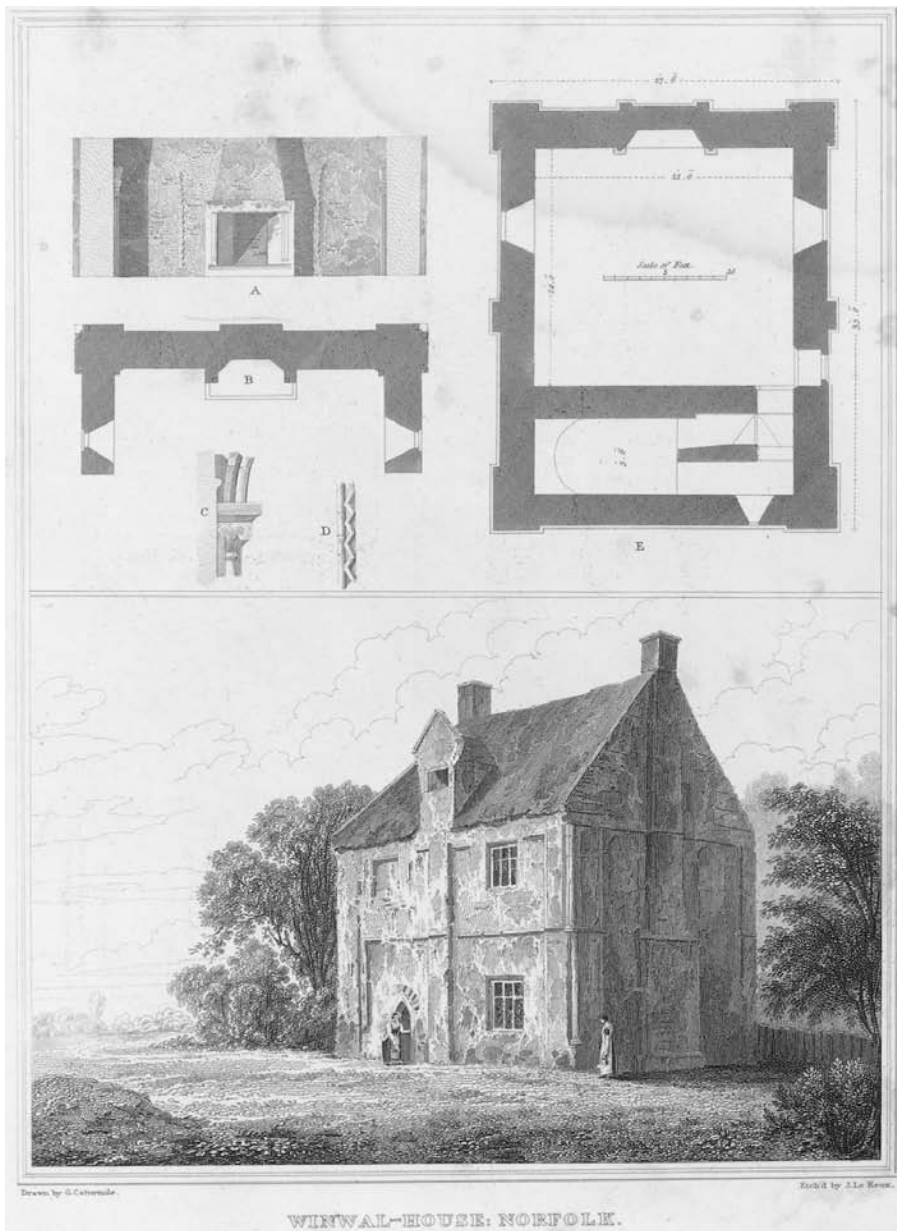


Fig. 42. The fine Romanesque chapel of Wereham (or Winwaloe) Priory, engraved by J. Le Keux and published in 1819 for Britton's *Chronological History of English Architecture*.

often by a professed member of the mother house.⁶⁴ These endowments were always used to provide renders or income to the mother church and the cell was always treated as an outpost, rather than as a distinct corporate body which attracted subsequent donations and gifts.

The corollary to this is that the archaeological study of these alien priories and their impact has been extremely limited. We may describe twenty-two of the houses in East Anglia as 'alien', but of these, seven are Cluniac foundations and therefore alien in the sense that they were subject to Cluny either directly or indirectly.⁶⁵ Apart from Witchingham, which was considered a parcel of Newton Longville,⁶⁶ all these Cluniac foundations were fully conventual monasteries and all, except Slevesholm, have left good documentary and/or archaeological evidence. The bulk of the remaining fifteen alien houses are of early post-Conquest date, nearly two-thirds having been founded by 1102. Of the remaining six, Wereham (by 1154) and Isleham (by 1163) are striking for their late dates.

The alien cells are of interest for a number of reasons. First, the eleventh-century date of the majority is indicative of the close ties the founders maintained with their 'homelands' in Normandy, and their loyalty to these institutions. The various properties in East Anglia were possessions used to endow other monastic foundations that were, for them, spiritually and perhaps geographically more central to their lives. In these circumstances it is perhaps easier to see why alien priory land grants, often made in the first flush of conquest, were generous compared to the incomes of later foundations like Hickling. In particular, these 'alien' land grants were usually made by under-tenants, rather than the tenants-in-chief like Robert Malet and Gilbert de Clare, whose priories at Eye and Stoke-by-Clare were altogether larger and better-endowed.

Given that the alien foundations were usually single land grants and typically operated as granges with little or no obvious investment in material culture (in contrast to other independent houses of similar size or wealth), it might be expected that the distribution of these lands at least would be random and scattered across the entire East Anglian region. Seen in isolation, this might appear to be the case. However, if these landholdings are then compared with all the subsequent monastic foundations to c.1200, the picture becomes far more tightly structured. Even apparently isolated lands such as Lessingham find themselves in the immediate vicinity of Bromholm and Hickling priories. Similarly, the apparently disparate priories at Field Dalling, Welle, Sporle and Wereham all find themselves as part of a thick *tranche* of houses running north-east to south-west, to the west of Norfolk. Clearly, the alien houses' geographical distribution belongs to the wider phenomenon of monastic distribution already discussed.

In summary, the presence and distribution of the alien houses often marked the beginnings of pious patronage by an incoming Norman nobility still looking to the Continent. The great monasteries of Normandy were having their endow-

⁶⁴ C. W. New has noted how such a monk-bailiff or monk-proctor was often 'loosely styled' a prior: *History of the Alien Priories in England*, p. 19.

⁶⁵ This total excludes Normansburgh, as this was only refounded as a Cluniac house c.1200: until then it had been Augustinian.

⁶⁶ Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses of England and Wales*, p. 99.

ments supplemented while a few new independent foundations were being made in East Anglia. As England became more surely dominated by the Norman aristocracy, so there was an increase in the number of English houses founded, more tightly keyed into local society. Although this provides an adequate expression of increasing Anglo-Norman religious and monastic patronage, it also illustrates how alien priories like Lessingham or Creting St Olave are of only tangential significance in discussing the wider themes of monasticism, as represented by houses like Castle Acre or Mendham. Accordingly, the discussion of monastic houses in the remainder of this chapter will focus upon those fifty-eight monastic houses of Cluniac or English foundation. The easiest way to begin such an examination is to look in more detail at those figures responsible for establishing the monastic landscape – the founders.

FOUNDING FAMILIES

As we have seen, a central concern of the monastic founder was to safeguard the well-being of his or her soul, as well as that of their spouse, and his/her predecessors or descendants. In theory, this coverage should have been enough for the salvation of all subsequent generations of a family. In practice, families were fluid structures and this dynamic could be unstabling for the care of their souls. The intermarriage of baronial families – the principal class of society involved in making independent religious foundations – not only caused disruption to direct vertical family lineage, it also blurred the focus of exactly who received spiritual benefits. Consequently, as new families emerged and landholdings were divided or adapted by new branches of families, so new monastic houses were established. This process has enabled some families to be examined for the evidence of which monastic orders they particularly patronised, for instance the Clares.⁶⁷ More usually, it demonstrates the way in which monastic orders rose and fell in popularity at certain times.

Within East Anglia, six families stand out in particular for their endowment of monastic houses: the Warennes, the Clares, the Albinis, the Bigods, the Valognes, and the Glanvilles. There is, in addition, one other major monastic founder from this period, Bishop Herbert de Losinga of Norwich. Together, the six families founded 18 of the 71 houses in the sample (25.3%), but their impact is placed in a better perspective if those alien houses that acted essentially as land grants are disregarded.⁶⁸ This revised sample of 58 monasteries has the 18 houses of the six families accounting for 31% of all foundations. If de Losinga's foundations are included, their 23 houses comprise 39.6% of all monastic foundations within the diocese of Norwich. This demonstrates that although these founding figures did not exercise total domination over the 'monastic market', they were extremely influential, reflecting their sizeable landholdings in the area. Their patronage may briefly be examined.

⁶⁷ Ward, 'Fashions in monastic endowment'.

⁶⁸ Here seen as Welle; Creting St Olave; Dunwich; Blakenham; Horstead; Lessingham; Toft Monks; Witchingham; Creting St Mary; Sporle; Field Dalling; Wereham and Isleham (listed in order of foundation).

The Warennes

Deriving their name from the hamlet of Varenne near Arques, Seine-Inférieure, Normandy, the family were lesser magnates rising only under William, the first earl of Sussex.⁶⁹ He campaigned with King William and is one of the few men who can be identified as actually having fought at Hastings. The wealth of his English estates brought him to the fore among the king's vassals. The Warennes were the first to bring the Cluniacs into England, at Lewes, a patronage well documented and, with the Cluniacs' influence in religious observance on the Continent, correspondingly prestigious.⁷⁰ The family's favour of the Cluniacs was restated when William de Warenne II founded Castle Acre at the family's second largest landholding, in Norfolk, c.1087–9.⁷¹ Subsequently his son, the third Earl Warenne, was to found the Cluniac cell at Slevesholm in Norfolk (1135×1148).⁷² This association with the Cluniacs probably held dual benefits. From a practical viewpoint, the existing institutional relationships must have made it more easy to find recruits to staff new cells. At another level, it enhanced the Warennes' claims to special devotion to, and confraternity with, Cluny. This close personal affinity is well attested for the Warennes in general who were, with a few exceptions, all buried within the chapter house and church of Lewes Priory down until Earl Richard (d.1375/6).⁷³ Lewes therefore acted not only for the salvation of Warenne souls, but as the family mausoleum and as a potent statement of the family's kinship, power and status.

Such loyalty and investment in a particular foundation illustrates the tension between continued adherence to a family monastery, and the desire to found new religious communities. With the Warennes, this can be seen in several instances. Castle Acre was a wealthy foundation with an income assessed at over £215 in 1291,⁷⁴ and impressive buildings whose remains constitute a photogenic 'text-book' priory layout. The monastery was founded at the family's Norfolk *caput* in association with an impressive new castle, a planned town with gates to the north and south, and a deerpark. Considerable investment was made at this site both in the creation of the town and the extensive monastic buildings.⁷⁵ Despite this, Warenne was buried at Lewes. Castle Acre Priory simply formed one component within a wider manipulation of the landscape by the family, demonstrating their power and centrality to their Norfolk *caput*.

⁶⁹ Hollister, 'Greater Domesday tenants in chief', p. 229.

⁷⁰ Golding, 'Coming of the Cluniacs', p. 65.

⁷¹ The foundation charter is preserved within the thirteenth-century Castle Acre cartulary, BL Harleian MS 2110, an edition of which is being prepared for publication by Prof. C. Harper-Bill. The foundation charter is published by Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, v, p. 49.

⁷² Locally pronounced 'Slosham'. The foundation was made *temp.* Stephen (1135–54) with the grant of the island of Slevesholm, in Methwold parish, to the brethren serving there. William's original grant is included within a later confirmation charter of 1309 by John de Warenne, Harleian MS 2110, fol. 7, printed by Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, v, pp. 71–2 and by Clay (ed.), *Early Yorkshire Charters VIII*, no. 98. The date of Slevesholm's foundation may be narrowed to 1135×1148 as William de Warenne III died on crusade 19 January 1148: Davis *et al.* (eds), *Regesta Regum*, iii, no. 876.

⁷³ Golding, 'Coming of the Cluniacs', p. 72.

⁷⁴ For the 1291 assessment see *VCH Norfolk*, ii, p. 356.

⁷⁵ Liddiard, 'Landscapes of Lordship', pp. 28–31, 44–5, 48–54, 56, 58 and 60–2.

Similar motives can be seen in the foundation of Wormegay Priory. Unlike Lewes and Castle Acre, this was an Augustinian foundation, a change possibly due to a secular community already existing here (see below, pp. 207–8) and to the increasing fashion for this order in the second half of the twelfth century. The foundation of Wormegay has recently been redated by Nicholas Vincent to 1166×1175, demonstrating that the priory was established by Reginald de Warenne, the third son of Earl William II and younger brother of Earl William III.⁷⁶ Reginald was employed by the third earl to administer the latter's Norfolk estates and later the whole family Honour when William left on crusade in 1147. By his marriage in 1166 to Alice de Wormegay, daughter of William de Wormegay, Reginald became a tenant-in-chief in his own right, of the Barony of Wormegay.⁷⁷ As a scion of the Warenne line, Reginald's new priory makes perfect sense, showing himself as the 'founder' of a new Warenne line, centred on Wormegay.

Once again, this foundation was one component of wider developments at the *caput*, including a castle, also possibly attributable to Reginald,⁷⁸ and a deerpark forming elements of an elite landscape. However, the strength of the central *caput* and family ties still bound; not only was Reginald buried at Lewes Priory but he became a monk there in the year preceding Michaelmas 1179.⁷⁹ Presumably, having been so involved with the running of the family's Honour, he saw himself as a part of the central family unit, and looked to Lewes as his spiritual home. Despite this close relationship, the family clearly did not feel obliged to patronise the order, and as we have seen, William de Warenne III's foundation of Holy Sepulchre Priory to the south of Thetford 1139×1148 probably had a proactive, symbolic, reason.⁸⁰ Such patronage was not only proper for a budding crusader but would have brought William into confraternity with an order based in the Holy Land. The move was probably considered especially prudent when William died on crusade.

⁷⁶ Vincent, 'Foundation of Wormegay Priory', p. 307. The charter survives in the Memoranda Rolls of Edward I, PRO: E.159/98 m. 19, with a witness list dated 1×9 July 1175. The dating limits are set by this and Reginald succeeding to his barony in 1166.

⁷⁷ Clay (ed.), *Early Yorkshire Charters VIII*, pp. 26–7.

⁷⁸ King, *Castellarium Anglicanum*, p. 309 and n. 21 has commented that it was 'possibly built at Conquest', citing Saunders, *English Baronies*, p. 101 that the barony of Wormegay appears to have been created then. Liddiard has seen Reginald as the founder of the castle on the basis that the Domesday holder of the manor, Hermer de Ferrers, does not appear to have had the material resources to raise a castle: *Landscapes of Lordship*, pp. 32–3.

⁷⁹ Clay (ed.), *Early Yorkshire Charters VIII*, p. 27. In a quitclaim of 24 January 1190–91, William his son exchanged land in Brighton with Lewes Priory for the vill of Newhaven which his father had given when he became a monk there: *ibid.*, p. 33.

⁸⁰ The priory can be dated on the basis of King Stephen gaining control of Thetford in 1139, and William de Warenne's death in 1148. The dating can in fact probably be tightened to 1146×1148 as Warenne refers to *palmiferis fratribus mei* ('my pilgrim brothers') in the foundation charter. Warenne took the cross with Louis VII of France and others at Vezelai in 1146: Hare, 'Priory of the Holy Sepulchre, Thetford', p. 190. The foundation charter, surviving as a fourteenth-century confirmation, is printed in Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, vi (2), p. 728. I have preferred to retain the widest possible bracket while acknowledging that a mid-1140s date is likely.

The Clares

The desire of baronial families to found a monastery at their *caput* can be seen in several instances in East Anglia. In the case of the Clares, the family rose from being adventurers in King William's service, with few lands in Normandy, to become one of the great families in England with four baronial branches.⁸¹ In the immediate aftermath of the Conquest, Richard and Baldwin, sons of Count Gilbert of Brionne, saw their true interests as lying in Normandy. Initially religious patronage was directed back to Normandy and focused on the Benedictine abbey of Bec, of which the Clares became principal benefactors.⁸² This forms a clear parallel with the Warenne's patronage of Cluny. The rise of Richard and Baldwin under King William saw both given Honours; Richard was given Clare and his son, Gilbert of Tonbridge, was to found a cell of Bec at Clare in Suffolk, reusing an Anglo-Saxon foundation made by Ælfric son of Wihtgar, some time 1044×1065.⁸³ This patronage was consistent with an emerging pattern; the priory was 'founded' c.1090 when Gilbert restored lands and men seized by his father, to a community based within his castle. In this case, when the priory was moved out of the castle in 1124, it was located at Stoke-by-Clare, some two miles away.⁸⁴

The Bigods

The Bigods were responsible for the foundation of two priories in Suffolk, at Walton (1087×1100) and Thetford St Mary (1103×1104). Walton's history is uncertain, but it appears to have been the creation of Roger Bigod or his son Hugh, Roger granting St Felix's church with tithes and appurtenances to Rochester Cathedral Priory, a grant confirmed by William Rufus.⁸⁵ The priory was first founded within the Roman shore fort at Walton, where Roger Bigod built a castle,

⁸¹ Well-documented by Ward, 'Royal service and reward', p. 278.

⁸² Ward, 'Fashions in monastic endowment', p. 430. One might take exception to her comment that 'of the four dependent priories founded by Bec in England, the Clares were responsible for three' (*ibid.*), that is, Cowick (Devon), St Neots and Stoke-by-Clare. There were a number of other dependencies of Bec in England, emphasising the difficulty in defining exactly what constituted a 'priory'. If we stress Ward's words 'founded by Bec' it removes the onus of action from the Clares. To say 'foundations of Bec' there are a whole additional series of houses. In East Anglia, Great Blakenham and Lessingham are obvious examples, best considered as land grants rather than priories proper (see above, pp. 171–5). These, in turn, were both dependent on Ogbourne Priory, Wiltshire, the chief of the dependencies of Bec in England, founded by Matilda de Wallingford before 1147: Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses of England and Wales*, p. 90. Gaussin, *L'Europe des Ordres et des Congrégations*, p. 57 says Bec had twenty dependencies in England although these are not enumerated. Chibnall has remarked that this total should be reduced to eight conventual and two or three non-conventual priories: 'Monastic foundations in England and Normandy', p. 41. For a more general discussion see Potter, 'Benefactors of Bec'.

⁸³ *LDB*, fol. 389b, where it is stated that the foundation had been taken into the king's hands. For this foundation see above, pp. 126–7. The refoundation of an Anglo-Saxon cell as a priory dependent on Bec had already been done elsewhere by Richard, in his re-establishment of St Neots, originally a daughter of Ely: Chibnall, 'History of the priory of St Neots', pp. 67–74.

⁸⁴ This relocation to Stoke may possibly have been partly motivated by a minster community already existing here by 1086: *LDB*, fol. 397a records a church with sixty acres valued at 10s. For the transfer see Harper-Bill and Mortimer (eds), *Stoke-by-Clare Cartulary III*, pp. 2–3.

⁸⁵ These Rochester charters were among several inspected and confirmed in letters patent of 10 November

destroyed in 1174 after the family's unsuccessful role in the rebellion against Henry II.⁸⁶ Walton was developed by the family into another example of a lordly residence at the centre of an elite landscape, including castle, priory, warren and a deerpark.⁸⁷ However, it was Thetford where the family were to concentrate their resources. Here, Roger Bigod established St Mary's Priory, eschewing the Benedictines favoured at Walton and using instead the fashionable Cluniac order, perhaps as a competitive response to the Warenne's patronage of them.⁸⁸ Seen in this light, it is noteworthy that while the house was colonized by monks from Lewes (founded by the Warennes), Thetford was itself subject directly to Cluny.

The Albinis

The Albini family's two East Anglian foundations conform to the patterns already seen. At Wymondham a Benedictine priory was founded as a cell of St Alban's Abbey, probably on the site of an Anglo-Saxon minster, in 1106×1107.⁸⁹ A familial connection leading to this relationship with St Albans seems certain as William's kinsman Richard d'Albini was abbot of St Albans 1097–1119.⁹⁰ The presence of a castle at Wymondham again establishes this site as being envisaged as a familial, honorial, monastery. By the time the Albini family came to make their second monastic foundation, their circumstances had changed: William d'Albini II had continued the family's rise in fortunes and married Alice of Louvain, widow of King Henry I. Through his marriage, this courtier became the first Earl Arundel, taking the Honour of Arundel that Henry had seized from Earl Robert Bellesme on the latter's rebellion, and bestowed on Alice. The *parvenu* Albini naturally had new and larger lands to exploit, and thereafter his attention, and those of his descendants, was focused less on Norfolk. But he did make one statement of piety, with the creation of a monastery at Buckenham, c.1146.⁹¹ Again, this followed the convention of a baronial *caput* with a planned landscape incorporating a newly laid-out town, market, castle, monastery and deerpark.⁹² In this case, the monastery was established away from the other elements from the start, being based on the site of the old castle, while Albini constructed a new residence of New Buckenham, a mile and a half away.

1275: *CChR* 1257–1300, pp. 193–5 at p. 195. For the confirmation by William Rufus see Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, i, p. 164.

⁸⁶ Davison, 'History of Walton Priory', p. 142; Wareham, 'Motives and politics', pp. 240–2.

⁸⁷ Hoppitt, 'Deer parks 1086–c.1600' and 'Rabbit warrens', both in Dymond and Martin (eds), *An Historical Atlas of Suffolk*, pp. 66–9.

⁸⁸ For the circumstances of Thetford's foundation see below, pp. 190–1, and Pestell, 'Monastic foundation strategies', pp. 224–9.

⁸⁹ The foundation charter is printed by Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, iii, p. 330. Its date can be narrowed by the appearance as witnesses of Stephen, prior of St Mary's, Thetford, who became head of that house in 1106 (Knowles *et al.*, *Heads of Religious Houses I*, p. 125) and Roger Bigod who died in 1107. For the Anglo-Saxon history of the site, see below, p. 195. For the post-Conquest building see Heywood, 'Wymondham Abbey'.

⁹⁰ Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, iii, p. 323; Knowles *et al.*, *Heads of Religious Houses I*, p. 66.

⁹¹ Edward III's confirmation of the foundation charter is printed in Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, vi (1), p. 419.

⁹² Liddiard, 'Landscapes of Lordship', pp. 46–9. For the castle see Renn, 'Keep at New Buckenham' and Remfry, *Buckenham Castles 1066–1649*.

The Valognes

In examining the Valognes family,⁹³ we move down a step in social rank. Peter de Valognes was a tenant-in-chief at Domesday and founded the Benedictine priory of Binham at some point before 1093.⁹⁴ He held land in six counties at the Survey, although his Norfolk holdings were the most valuable with a total value of some £67 15s. In this case we meet with no evidence for castle building by Valognes and so it is more difficult to identify the choice of Binham as being due to the desire to create a familial *caput*. The family's next foundation was made eighty years later, when in 1185 Theobald de Valognes established a priory with Augustinian canons at Hickling.⁹⁵ About ten years after that, Theobald gave his sisters, Joan and Agnes, land to found the Augustinian nunnery at Campsey Ash in Suffolk.⁹⁶ In none of these cases does the family seem to have the same planned large-scale manipulation of the landscape expressed in the creation of a multi-faceted estate centre with attendant castles or deerparks. Instead, the dynastic element was restricted and preserved in the choice of a monastic community acting eternally on behalf of the family.

The Glanvilles

One final example of the shift in religious patronage may be seen in the case of the Glanvilles. The family were not of high baronial rank, being tenants of Robert Malet at Domesday. They were, though, responsible for four foundations in just under sixty years, beginning with William de Glanville founding Bromholm Priory in 1113, initially as a cell of Castle Acre.⁹⁷ Their next foundations were

⁹³ The orthography is variable and the name is encountered variously as Valoignes, Valoines, Valognes, Valoniis and Valeines.

⁹⁴ The foundation charter, printed by Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, iii, pp. 345–6, dates to 1101×1107. The bracket is established by the witness list, Richard becoming abbot of Holm St Benet's in 1101 and the second of two consecutive Abbot Roberts of Bury St Edmunds, who died on 16 September 1107: Knowles *et al.*, *Heads of Religious Houses I*, pp. 68 and 33. That a foundation occurred at Binham somewhat earlier is evinced by Matthew Paris's discussion of Abbot Paul of St Albans in his *Vitae Abbati Sancti Albani*, describing how the cell of Binham, with lands, tithes and all temporalities pertaining to it, were contributed through the industry of this abbot: Riley (ed.), *Gesta Abbatum Monasterii sancti Albani*, i, p. 57. Abbot Paul died on 11 November 1093: Knowles *et al.*, *Heads of Religious Houses I*, p. 66.

⁹⁵ Theobald was probably from a different branch of the family: Mortimer, 'Family of Rannulf de Glanville', p. 8 n. 6. The foundation date of 1185 is derived from the chronicle kept by the monks of Holm St Benet's Abbey and subsequently continued by the canons of Hickling up to 1503, printed in the appendix to the second edition of Ellis (ed.), *Chronica Johannis de Oxenedes*, p. 433: The confirmation of Hickling's foundation is noted in Harper-Bill (ed.), *English Episcopal Acta VI Norwich 1070–1214*, no. 226.

⁹⁶ The foundation is dated only to c.1195, based on the gift of land being before 7 Ric. I: Tanner, *Notitia Monastica* (no pagination). The confirmation of Theobald's grant, dated 28 January 1203 or 1204, is printed in Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, vi (1), p. 585.

⁹⁷ Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, v, p. 59. Unfortunately the first two folios of the house cartulary (Cambridge University Library MS Mm.2.20) are illegible. Extracts from the cartulary were transcribed in the nineteenth century by Henrietta Phillipps and are now in the Bodleian Library, Phillipps MS 11498: Clapinson and Rogers, *Summary Catalogue of Post-Medieval Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, Oxford*, ii, p. 967. A confirmation charter of William's son, Bartholomew, from the Castle Acre cartulary (BL Harley MS 2110, fol. 62), is printed by Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, v, p. 63.

made by Rannulf de Glanville with his two establishments in Suffolk, of the Augustinian priory at Butley (1171) and Premonstratensian abbey at Leiston (c.1182).⁹⁸ Finally, a nunnery at Bungay was founded c.1183, apparently by Rannulf's aunt and uncle, Roger de Glanville and his wife the Countess Gundreda.⁹⁹ In this instance the foundation probably owed more to Countess Gundreda's actions as the endowments consisted of possessions from her dowry. Although there is no evidence for her having entered the nunnery as a widow, Bungay may have been a precaution designed to provide for a noblewoman whose husband went, and probably died, on crusade.¹⁰⁰

The location of these houses, like those of the Valognes, do not, in general, match those of the greater families which we have already seen but, needless to say, they still relate to the larger centres of the various familial landholdings. For instance, Theobald de Valognes held five and a half fees in Suffolk centred on Parham in East Suffolk, and at Hickling; and it was at Hickling that his grandson founded the priory. In both Norfolk and Suffolk the family owned land adjacent to the Glanvilles. For Rannulf de Glanville, his two foundations again centred on his landholdings, Butley and Leiston being only some twelve miles apart.¹⁰¹ Two points are worthy of comment. First, the social scale at which these foundations were taking place was less exalted than in the first wave of conventual monastic patronage following the Conquest. Nevertheless, a continued desire for establishing new foundations can be seen. Evidently, the social messages to be conveyed were considered the same as for the larger landholders. In particular, the priory was central to the territory of a founder and helped to mark out their lordship – secular and spiritual – in the area. Secondly, monasteries remained an expression of power and status, often in an *arriviste* sense. For instance, Richard Mortimer has noted that 'the apogee of the Glanville family's hunt for office coincides more or less with the majority of their monastic foundations, as if to publicise their success'.¹⁰²

Not all monasteries are so easy to categorise as these, and the variety in size and type ensures that there are exceptions. Among small foundations one might note St Bartholomew's, Sudbury, founded some time before 1116 by Wulfric the Moneyer as a cell of Westminster, confirmed in a charter of 1114×1116.¹⁰³ The choice of Westminster as mother house was perhaps strange for a founder whose background appears to have been provincial (Wulfric struck coinage for the

⁹⁸ Mortimer (ed.), *Leiston Abbey Cartulary*, pp. 1–2.

⁹⁹ Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, iv, p. 337, followed by *VCH Suffolk*, ii, p. 81, give the foundation date as 'about 1160'. However, the foundation charter is recorded by the Holm St Benet's monk John de Oxenedes as occurring on 7 August 1183: Ellis (ed.), *Chronica Johannis de Oxenedes*, p. 69. A confirmation charter of Henry II appears to date from 1188: Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, iv, p. 338; Eyton, *Court, Household and Itinerary of King Henry II*, p. 285.

¹⁰⁰ Thompson, *Women Religious*, pp. 175–7; Mortimer, 'Family of Rannulf de Glanville', p. 5.

¹⁰¹ Glanville was, according to the house tradition of Butley Priory, born at Stratford (probably Stratford St Andrew) in Suffolk, about five and a half miles from Butley: White (ed.), 'Unpublished fourteenth-century rent-roll', p. 30.

¹⁰² Mortimer, 'Family of Rannulf de Glanville', p. 12.

¹⁰³ Mortimer (ed.), *Charters of St Bartholomew's Priory*, p. 1 and no. 1.

Conqueror, William Rufus and Henry). However, he might have worked elsewhere too, and because his dies were probably made in London, this would have given him the opportunity to become familiar with this Benedictine house. Whatever Wulfric's reason for choosing Westminster, his foundation brought him fraternity there and admission as a monk.¹⁰⁴ The fact that St Bartholomew's always remained tiny, with little expansion of its holdings, reiterates the modest basis from which the house started and the very personal reason which was the cell's founding premise.¹⁰⁵

The foregoing has shown that while soils and topography undoubtedly helped to structure the overall distribution of monasteries, this approach is only one part of the story. Of equal importance was the influence of the individual in patronage. The example of Sudbury Priory illustrates the way that monastic foundations could be motivated by intensely personal aspects beyond the conventional displays of piety and prestige by social elites, designed to express continuity and familial succession, as exemplified by the Warennes at Lewes. That monasteries could still have an intensely political rationale in the post-Conquest period is well illustrated by the religious patronage of one particular founder, Herbert de Losinga, first bishop of Norwich (1091–1119).¹⁰⁶ Unlike secular lords, he had no castle like a Warenne or Albini,¹⁰⁷ but he did wield great power and wealth. In his cathedral he had the equivalent of any *caput*. Above all, he had a political agenda structured by two aims, namely reinforcing the religious organisation and power in the region; and regaining credibility and some measure of control within his diocese, following the failure of his predecessor, Herfast, to relocate the see to Bury St Edmunds.¹⁰⁸ In the pursuit of these aims, his own peculiar 'dynastic' agenda, he was to use the monastery as his representative.¹⁰⁹

THE FOUNDATIONS OF BISHOP HERBERT DE LOSINGA

Herbert's *sedes* had been transferred from North Elmham to Thetford on the Norfolk-Suffolk border by a predecessor, Herfast (1070–85), apparently soon after the latter became bishop.¹¹⁰ This move to one of the largest towns in the

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁵ The only remains of the priory are a chapel of single-celled fourteenth-century build with a fourteenth-century aisled barn nearby. However, these arguably belong to the reorganisation of the priory made between 1349 and 1361 with the 'greatest event in the priory's history', the foundation of a chantry by Nigel Thebaud, then bishop of London: *ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ For biographies of Herbert see Beloe, 'Herbert de Losinga'; Wollaston, 'Herbert de Losinga' and Alexander, 'Herbert of Norwich'. For his collection of writings see Anstruther (ed.), *Epistolae Herberti de Losinga* and Goulburn and Symonds (eds), *The Life, Letters and Sermons of Bishop Herbert de Losinga*.

¹⁰⁷ Although it is interesting to note that his bishop's palace, placed immediately to the north of the cathedral, imitated military design with its tall proportions and thick walls. It was also connected directly into the cathedral through a first-floor walkway, analogous to Charlemagne's palace and chapel at Aachen: Fernie, *Architectural History of Norwich Cathedral*, p. 89; Kreusch, 'Kirche, atrium und porticus', p. 505ff.

¹⁰⁸ For the dispute and its resolution see Gransden, 'Baldwin' and 'Legends and traditions', pp. 91–4.

¹⁰⁹ The following is set out in greater detail in Pestell, 'Monastic foundation strategies', pp. 204–23.

¹¹⁰ The transfer is recorded as 1070 in the thirteenth-century *Chronica Minor Sancti Benedicti de Hulmo*,

region was only temporary and part of wider administrative changes; the booming city of Norwich had apparently already been earmarked as the see's ultimate destination, to join the royal castle and borough being established there.¹¹¹ These developments were to come to fruition under Herbert, work on the new cathedral beginning c.1096.¹¹² We are fortunate that this and subsequent developments are described in some detail in the cathedral priory's early fourteenth-century house cartulary, the *First Register*, the contents of which are linked by a narrative.¹¹³ In common with many English sees, Herbert decided to have a Benedictine priory attached to his cathedral which, with his palace built to the north, created an impressive episcopal complex at the centre of Norwich. The locational significance of this revolved around its relationship with the topography of the Late Anglo-Saxon town (Fig. 43).

The cathedral and its priory were massive architectural and institutional undertakings, and while limited archaeological excavation has been possible within the cathedral close, this whole area south of the River Wensum appears to have been built up by the Conquest.¹¹⁴ Crucially, the cathedral site was placed immediately to the east of the market place of Tombland. To one side of this economic hub stood the rich Late Anglo-Saxon minster church of St Michael. This church had its own entry in Domesday Book, holding a carucate of land worth twenty shillings *TRE*.¹¹⁵ St Michael's may have been a royal foundation since it is also mentioned in Domesday amongst the holdings of the king, held in 1086 by Bishop William Bellofago, although not belonging to the see.¹¹⁶ Such an establishment could only have provided competition for the new cathedral, not least

ending 1294, while John de Oxenedes recorded the transfer under 1071 in his *Chronica*, completed c.1292: Ellis (ed.), *Chronica Johannis de Oxenedes*, pp. 30 and 431. The transfer seems to be confirmed by Herfast signing a decree in Easter 1072 as bishop of Elmham or Thetford: Harper-Bill (ed.), *English Episcopal Acta VI Norwich 1070–1214*, no. 1.

¹¹¹ Herfast is described as 'bishop of Norwich' in the subscriptions to the decrees of a Council at London. The contemporary document, written by a member of Lanfranc's household (Cambridge, St John's College MS L.9 (236)), is dated 25 December 1074 × 28 August 1075: Whitelock et al. (eds), *Councils and Synods*, ii, no. 92. For Norwich Castle and the borough see Shepherd Popescu, *Excavations at Norwich Castle*, forthcoming.

¹¹² Herbert is referred to as bishop of Norwich when attesting a charter in Bath in September 1101: Davis et al. (eds), *Regesta Regum*, ii, nos 524 and 544. However, Anselm addressed him as bishop of Thetford in a letter written apparently after the Council of Westminster in 1102 and again when writing to Samson of Worcester in 1108: Schmitt (ed.), *Sancti Anselmi Cantuariensis*, iv, no. 254 and v, no. 464. An inspection of the land to be used for the cathedral was probably carried out in 1095, the writ acknowledging it being dated January 1096: Dodwell (ed.), *Charters of Norwich Cathedral Priory*, i, no. 1. See also Dodwell, 'Foundation of Norwich cathedral'.

¹¹³ The *First Register* appears to have been written c.1306, perhaps by Bartholomew Cotton (d.1322), the former priory cellarer who was also the author of the *Historia Anglicana* (ed. H. Luard). An edition of the cartulary is Saunders (ed.), *First Register of Norwich Cathedral Priory*. For the date of c.1306 see Davis, *Medieval Cartularies*, p. 80. For more general discussion of the bishopric see Dodwell, 'Honor of the Bishop of Thetford/Norwich'.

¹¹⁴ As suggested by Ayers, *Norwich*, pp. 37–42 and in his 'Cathedral site before 1096'. In 2001 and February 2002 excavations in the medieval cathedral refectory range revealed a Late Anglo-Saxon metalled road surface with evidence for timber buildings on either side and rubbish pits behind: Gurney and Penn (eds), 'Excavations and surveys in Norfolk, 2001', p. 171 and H. Wallis, Norfolk Archaeological Unit, pers. comm.

¹¹⁵ *LDB*, fol. 201b.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, fol. 116b.

Landscapes of Monastic Foundation

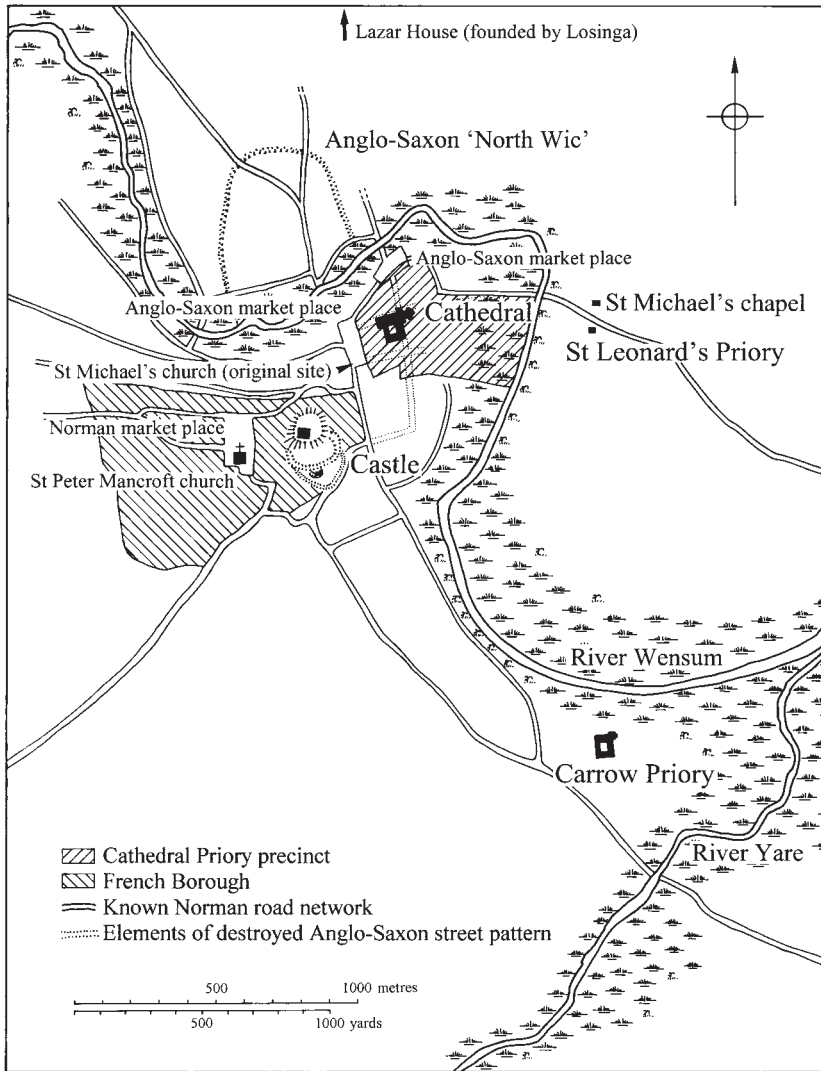


Fig. 43. The topography of Early Norman Norwich showing the location of sites mentioned in the text.

perhaps as a focus for indigenous townspeople's devotion. The first hint of the church's fate is probably its position in Domesday, immediately after the landholdings of the bishop: St Michael's was to be destroyed, ostensibly to allow the construction of the precinct, and its endowment incorporated within that of the cathedral.¹¹⁷ St Michael's was not allowed to die, but was relocated, in the drastically attenuated form of a chapel, served by monks of the cathedral priory through

¹¹⁷ Although St Michael's location is unclear, its position on the edge of Tomblond would still have left it well over 100 metres away from the cathedral, set back behind its precinct wall. St Michael's land was sold by Herbert to Roger Bigod before being returned to Bigod in exchange for episcopal land near Thetford: Saunders (ed.), *First Register of Norwich Cathedral Priory*, pp. 24–7.

the newly established monastic cell of St Leonard's Priory.¹¹⁸ Crucially, this chapel and the adjacent priory were located outside the limits of the medieval city on Surrey Mount, an outcrop of chalk rising to over thirty-five metres above sea level, and forming one of the steepest hills in Norwich. St Leonard's Priory has been characterised as a temporary home for the monks during the construction of the cathedral, but such a cell could have been established anywhere, not least close to the future site of the cathedral within the nascent precinct area. As the *First Register* makes clear, the land of St Michael's chapel had been set aside by Herbert first.¹¹⁹ The inescapable conclusion is that St Leonard's Priory was fundamentally a means of controlling the memory of St Michael's church, its dramatic position easily visible from within the economic heart of Norwich. Standing together, the chapel and priory cell mediated a clear statement of the new political order redeveloping the town.

Herbert de Losinga was personally responsible for the foundation of two more monastic cells, of St Nicholas' Priory, Yarmouth and St Margaret's Priory, Lynn. Both appear to have been based upon important Anglo-Saxon churches, and both were placed in locations of expanding economic importance, a policy Neil Batcock has described as 'episcopal imperialism'.¹²⁰ While Norwich Cathedral Priory's *First Register* characterised Yarmouth as a small place with 'a certain tiny chapel',¹²¹ Domesday Book presents a rather different picture. This reveals that Yarmouth was already a borough – like Norwich and Thetford – with a church valued at twenty shillings, that is, the same value as the minster of St Michael's in Norwich.¹²² Once again, Herbert was taking an established Anglo-Saxon minster church and refounding it as a Benedictine cell of his cathedral priory. The wealth of the borough at Yarmouth was almost certainly based upon fishing, for which there is good archaeological evidence.¹²³ There are few indications for Yarmouth being the centre of some widespread *parochia*, but the rights of St Nicholas' church were guarded so jealously that not even a chapel was established in the town until the nineteenth century for the ease of parishioners.¹²⁴ Yarmouth's church was not apparently wealthy through any large ancient establishment: the sandbank upon which St Nicholas' and its attendant borough was built probably only formed, as a result of longshore drift, in the Late Anglo-Saxon period.¹²⁵ Instead, the church probably owed its wealth to rights and tolls earned from the fishing trade. The control of these does much to explain the subsequent

¹¹⁸ For an outline history of this cell see Bensley, 'St Leonard's Priory, Norwich'.

¹¹⁹ Saunders (ed.), *First Register of Norwich Cathedral Priory*, pp. 30–1.

¹²⁰ Batcock, 'Parish churches in Norfolk', p. 188.

¹²¹ *quadam parvula capella*: Saunders (ed.), *First Register of Norwich Cathedral Priory*, pp. 30–2.

¹²² *LDB*, fol. 118b.

¹²³ Excavation has yielded a large assemblage of fishing hooks from Late Anglo-Saxon and Early Norman layers on Fuller's Hill near St Nicholas' church: Rogerson, 'Excavations on Fuller's Hill', pp. 160–1 and 165–6.

¹²⁴ As a consequence, St Nicholas' church ballooned in size with numerous rebuildings, leaving it with a massive internal floor area of some 23,085 sq. ft., enough to accommodate some 4,000 townspeople: Morant, 'Notices on the church of St Nicholas', pp. 215–16. By contrast, the adjacent village of Caister had five churches by 1198, which were granted in that year by Hugh de Gournay to the collegiate church of St Hildevert de Gournai: Gurney (ed.), *The Record of the House of Gournay*, i, pp. 162–7.

¹²⁵ Rogerson, 'Excavations on Fuller's Hill', pp. 133–4.

riot by *portenses* who turned out the chaplain the bishop had appointed to his new church. This group, translated by Saunders as ‘men of the ports’ in his edition of Norwich Cathedral Priory’s *First Register*, are in fact likely to have been from the Cinque Ports, often described simply as ‘the portsmen’ in later medieval Yarmouth documents.¹²⁶ Their presence in the town was manifested in the construction of a chapel near to Yarmouth between 1146 and 1154 in defiance of the bishop of Norwich and their reason for rioting is most sensibly interpreted as a change in the control or exercise of rights by the bishop.¹²⁷

Yarmouth was clearly an early focus of some sort, because Southwold in Suffolk had in its Domesday entry a valuation ‘9 furlongs long and 5 broad. This *divisio* [extends] from the sea to Yarmouth and [it pays] 2½d in geld.’¹²⁸ The exact nature of the entry is unclear, although it seems to indicate Southwold’s geld assessment.¹²⁹ The mention of a *divisio* is also confusing. The term is normally used in the context of a unit of administration but here fails to make it clear whether such a unit belonged to Yarmouth (in the sense of Southwold belonging to Yarmouth as a berewick), or more likely ‘extended to’. Because Southwold is twenty miles to the south of Yarmouth and the area assessed in Domesday is clearly not large enough to extend north to Yarmouth, the implication is that Yarmouth’s sphere of influence extended this far to the south. This may also help to account for why twenty-four fishermen belonging to the manor of Gorleston were recorded in Yarmouth in 1086.¹³⁰

While securing an important centre for the fishing trade was clearly a priority in Losinga’s acquisition of Yarmouth and his establishment of the priory, a ready political dimension may also be discerned. As its Domesday Book entry makes clear, Southwold was also a port of some importance by 1086, the manor being owned by Bury St Edmund’s Abbey and rendering 25,000 herrings a year for the supply of the monks.¹³¹ Given the tension that existed between the East Anglian bishops and the abbey, Losinga’s actions may have been partially intended to head off a rival which had the money and influence to develop a port to rival Yarmouth. Placing a block on Bury’s potential for expansion must have been especially gratifying for Herbert given that a previous East Anglian diocesan, Ælfric, had given Southwold to Bury in the mid-eleventh century.¹³² Yarmouth

¹²⁶ Saunders (ed.), *First Register of Norwich Cathedral Priory*, pp. 32–3.

¹²⁷ For the presence of Cinque Portsmen in Yarmouth by the eleventh century see Murray, *Constitutional History of the Cinque Ports*, p. 147. For the location of their chapel, perhaps on Green Hill, see Palmer, *Henry Manship’s History of Great Yarmouth*, p. 32 and Rutledge, ‘Before the walls’, p. 42.

¹²⁸ LDB, fol. 371b.

¹²⁹ The entry is compressed in the manuscript because it is misplaced; it should have followed Southwold’s entry where it would have occupied the normal place for geld assessments.

¹³⁰ LDB, fol. 283a.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 371b. See also Scarfe, ‘Southwold: St Edmund’s offshore island’.

¹³² The Bury St Edmunds ‘List of Benefactors’ remembers this Ælfric as ‘the Good’ (*cognomento bonus*): Hart, *Early Charters of Eastern England*, p. 248. However, this sobriquet was also used of the first East Anglian bishop called Ælfric which would date the gift to Bury at some time around 967–9: Rigold, ‘Bishop of the re-established see’, p. 8. Confusingly, there were two subsequent, successive, East Anglian bishops called Ælfric, first ‘the Black’ and second ‘the Little’: Robertson (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, p. 425. The first Ælfric succeeded Ælfwine (whose last attestation occurred in 1022) and who, according to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (C and E), died in 1038. The second Ælfric’s

Priory, an impressive structure with crossing tower and transepts, stood on the most prominent feature in Yarmouth, Fuller's Hill. Its position made it a considerable local landmark, both out to sea and inland across the expansive Halvergate marshes.

The evidence of Lynn, known as Bishop's Lynn until the early sixteenth century, is less certain.¹³³ Extensive archaeological excavations have shown how Lynn was established as a 'new' town to take advantage of its location on the edge of the Wash.¹³⁴ Here it had access to the hinterlands of East Anglia and the Midlands, through the complex of river systems flowing into the North Sea, and acted as a port for fishing and wider mercantile trade with north-west Europe. Although Lynn itself was a new town, the East Anglian bishops had long had a presence in the area through their possession of the manor of Gaywood. This manor seems likely to have been associated with the wealthy Middle and Late Anglo-Saxon 'productive' site of Bawsey which had acted as a significant redistributive focus in the surrounding area as early as the eighth century.¹³⁵ Bawsey's decline was probably accelerated by isostatic change and the silting of the River Gaywood, leaving the site increasingly inland and isolated. Lynn may therefore have represented the re-establishment of a trading site by the bishop further down the Gaywood.

Essential to these moves was the foundation of St Margaret's Priory in a prominent position adjacent to the outfall of the River Gaywood some time before 1106. The surviving Romanesque architecture shows the pretensions of the place, a large church with central crossing tower and transepts having a 'monastic' west front with flanking towers.¹³⁶ The *raison d'être* of the new site, the market-place, was positioned immediately adjacent, to the north-west of the church. The centrality of the priory to the new town is indicated by Losinga's grant to it of all profits from the Saturday market, and jurisdiction over the land between the Purfleet and Millfleet, the initial area of settlement.¹³⁷ Lynn was not simply speculative capitalism on the part of the bishop: the 'productive' site at Bawsey demonstrated the potential for trade in the area certainly in the ninth and probably tenth centuries, while at Domesday nearby Wisbech constituted a nodal point through which riverine traffic passed between the Midlands and the North Sea. From his time as abbot of Ramsey Abbey and through his knowledge that Wisbech was a profitable holding of Ely Abbey, Losinga must have been aware of

succession date is unknown but he was dead by 1043 when Stigand succeeded him. The gift of Southwold, along with other estates some time 1022×1043, seems much more probable.

¹³³ The town was incorporated in 1525 and the episcopal liberty and courts were conveyed to it in 1537: Owen (ed.), *Making of King's Lynn*, p. 37.

¹³⁴ For the archaeology see Clarke and Carter, *Excavations in King's Lynn* and Clarke, 'Changing riverline of King's Lynn'.

¹³⁵ Bawsey was quite probably of some importance even earlier as a number of Iron Age finds have been recovered from the site, including three gold torcs. The Anglo-Saxon site and its finds are discussed in Blackburn *et al.*, 'A productive Middle and Late Saxon site' and Rogerson, 'Six outstanding Middle Anglo-Saxon sites', pp. 112–14; for the tenurial arrangements see Pestell, 'The afterlife', pp. 124–6.

¹³⁶ Pevsner and Wilson, *Buildings of England Norfolk*, 2: *North-West and South*, pp. 465–8; Fernie, *Architectural History of Norwich Cathedral*, p. 207.

¹³⁷ Printed in Dodwell (ed.), *Charters of Norwich Cathedral Priory*, i, no. 107, and Owen (ed.), *Making of King's Lynn*, no. 2.

the economic potential held by his manor of Gaywood. The rationalisation of this, with his new town being administered by a priory cell of his larger monastic creation at Norwich, demonstrates not simply a grasp of the commercial opportunities available, but use of the monastery as his personal representative. We need not be surprised at Herbert's motives, given that a similar process may well have been occurring elsewhere in England at much the same time. As David Austin has suggested, in the palatinate of Durham 'the bishops were creating a centralised and autonomous region . . . new boroughs, markets and fairs seem to have been part of this political plan'.¹³⁸ The economic importance of this was seen in the competition for trade along the Tyne between North and South Shields, Gateshead and Newcastle.

If Herbert's use of monastic cells in Norwich, Yarmouth and Lynn has an intensely political strand in their foundation, this was no more than one theme of this bishop's personal energy in imposing control over his diocese, marked by his closure of the old East Anglian cathedral at North Elmham, and building an imposing new parish church further to the south; in place of the cathedral he built a large episcopal chapel of curious design with western towers, narthex and apsidal chancel, paralleled almost exactly by a similar structure in South Elmham.¹³⁹ He was also the founder of certainly one and probably two leper hospitals, that of St Mary Magdalene to the north-east of Norwich 1101×1119, the other of the same dedication on the Gaywood causeway outside Lynn.¹⁴⁰

The proactive role of his monastic cells stands in contrast to Norwich Cathedral Priory's other two cells, both of which relate more to private devotion. Aldeby Priory in Norfolk was established in the parish church, which was granted to the monks of Norwich 1107×1116. The church had been the gift of Agnes de Beaufour or Bellofago, wife of Hubert de Rye; the latter's gift of tithes to the house was confirmed in a charter of Henry I.¹⁴¹ Hubert appears to have been an active patron of Losinga's new cathedral, as the *First Register* describes him as laying its second foundation stone.¹⁴² The initial grant may have been occasioned by Agnes's father, Ralph de Beaufour, being formerly the sheriff of Norfolk and possibly the brother of Herbert's predecessor, William Bellofago, bishop of

¹³⁸ Austin, 'Central Place Theory and the Middle Ages', p. 101.

¹³⁹ These structures have in the past been attributed an Anglo-Saxon date: Rigold, 'Anglian cathedral of North Elmham'; Smedley and Owles, 'Excavations at the Old Minster, South Elmham'. This date has been defended by Batcock, 'Parish churches in Norfolk', p. 179 n. 4, but the case for a post-Conquest date made by Heywood, 'Ruined church at North Elmham', is compelling. That the old cathedral site was beneath his chapel at North Elmham is strongly indicated by the excavations of Peter Wade-Martins, which showed Late Anglo-Saxon burials to the south and west of the building, while no such early burials were found near the parish church: Wade-Martins, *Excavations in North Elmham Park 1967-72*, pp. 188-9 and figs 10, 12 and 158. For the identification and location of South Elmham's minster church see also Ridgard, 'References to South Elmham minster' and Hardy with Martin, 'South Elmham St Margaret'.

¹⁴⁰ Rawcliffe, *Hospitals of Medieval Norwich*, pp. 41-7 and pers. comm. Losinga also appears to have had a hand in the foundation of St Paul's Hospital, Norwich, although it was essentially a monastic foundation made by Ingulf, the first prior of Norwich, and was endowed by Losinga's successor Everard: *ibid.*, pp. 61-3.

¹⁴¹ Dodwell (ed.), *Charters of Norwich Cathedral Priory*, i, no. 20.

¹⁴² Saunders (ed.), *First Register of Norwich Cathedral Priory*, pp. 50-1.

Thetford 1085–91.¹⁴³ The creation of a priory at Aldeby was of suitable honour to both the cathedral and the Beaufour family's role in its construction.

The priory at Hoxne in Suffolk was founded in 1130, eleven years after Herbert de Losinga's death, by Maurice de Windsor and his wife Edith. In fact, a community of priests had probably been there since the tenth century, and the church had been given by Herbert de Losinga to Norwich Cathedral Priory in 1100×1101.¹⁴⁴ The grant of the church to Ralph, dapifer of St Edmunds, and Edith his wife under Herbert de Losinga, evidenced in a charter of 1107×1119, constituted a 'remarkable example of episcopal recognition . . . of an *Eigenkirch*'.¹⁴⁵ The gift of the chapel back to the cathedral priory in 1130, 'for the placing of monks there', was recorded in the *First Register* and presumably reflects the relationship Hoxne had with the see, as well as the wishes of the founders to create a priory and to regularise the community living in their church.¹⁴⁶

Both Aldeby and Hoxne gave honour to Norwich Cathedral and its priory, and at Hoxne the foundation of a monastic cell was of some status given the claims of that place to have been the first resting place of St Edmund himself. However, both priories lack the involvement with growing or wealthy towns seen at Losinga's cells in Norwich, Yarmouth and Lynn. If, as seems to be the case, Herbert was deliberately constructing monastic cells in strategic places, their absence from Thetford seems strange. This was, after all, the largest and most important Late Anglo-Saxon town in East Anglia, a borough and the place to which the East Anglian see had been moved initially after the abandonment of Elmham.¹⁴⁷

The explanation for this omission seems to be the political aspirations and monastic patronage of another figure, Roger Bigod, sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk.¹⁴⁸ Bigod's desire to found a monastery is readily understandable given his wealth, but it is his social position which informs us best about the location

¹⁴³ Ralph de Beaufour held Aldeby in 1086; *LDB*, fol. 225b. William de Bellofago was a royal chaplain appointed by William I at Christmas 1085, according to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 'E'.

¹⁴⁴ Hoxne was mentioned first in the will of Bishop Theodred of London 942×951 and second in the will of Bishop Ælfric II or III of Elmham, before 1043: Whitelock (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, nos 1 and 26. For Losinga's gift see also Dodwell (ed.), *Charters of Norwich Cathedral Priory*, i, no. 112 and Harper-Bill (ed.), *English Episcopal Acta VI: Norwich 1070–1214*, no. 11.

¹⁴⁵ Harper-Bill (ed.), *English Episcopal Acta VI: Norwich 1070–1214*, pp. 16–17 and no. 19.

¹⁴⁶ In fact these intentions may have been there from the start, as the charter of Herbert 1107×1119 included two acres next to the church, to increase its curtilage: Harper-Bill (ed.), *English Episcopal Acta VI: Norwich 1070–1214*, no. 19. This rebuilding is attested in the foundation grant of 1130 which mentions Ralph *dapifer* as building 'that church from the original foundations': Saunders (ed.), *First Register of Norwich Cathedral Priory*, pp. 68–9. That Ralph should be singled out for commendation, in addition to the souls of Maurice and Edith and their ancestors, suggests that Carey-Evans is correct to surmise Edith had remarried Maurice: 'Contribution of Hoxne', p. 185. Indeed, she was perhaps the prime mover in the foundation.

¹⁴⁷ Thetford was one of the largest towns in England at the Conquest, with 943 burgesses, although their number declined to 720 with 224 empty houses by 1086: *LDB*, fol. 118b. The town remained of importance, attracting three priories, two friaries and numerous parish churches, chapels and hospitals in the medieval period.

¹⁴⁸ Bigod held the shrievalty at various points and seems to have relied upon it for a good proportion of his wealth: Wareham, 'Motives and politics', pp. 224–7; Green, *English Sheriffs to 1154*, pp. 60–1 and 76–7 and 'Sheriffs of William the Conqueror'.

selected for this patronage. Thetford is geographically near the centre of East Anglia, straddling the Norfolk-Suffolk border, and constituted a Hundred in its own right. As sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk, the borough was naturally of symbolic importance to Bigod in marking the centre of his extensive power and authority. Although the foundation charter to his Cluniac priory is generally dated 1103 or 1104, his plans for a religious foundation appear to date from at least 1086.¹⁴⁹ In Domesday Book, Bigod is recorded as having a monastery, and two smallholders belonging to this, within the king's lands.¹⁵⁰ The term used is quite unambiguous, using *monasterium* rather than the standard *ecclesia* found everywhere else for churches of all types within Little Domesday. The creation of an endowment is further hinted at in 1101. In Norwich Cathedral Priory's *First Register*, land at Taverham and Tombland in Norwich which Bigod had bought from Herbert de Losinga was re-acquired by the bishop in exchange for land at Silham and Wykes near Thetford, 'which land indeed the monks of Thetford now hold, as in their charters is fully contained'.¹⁵¹ These actions suggest that, with the king's assent, Herbert de Losinga and Roger Bigod were actively co-operating in the pursuit of their monastic projects. It was Bigod, for instance, who had forcibly quelled the riot of the *portenses* at Yarmouth, re-establishing Herbert's chaplain. The horse-trading and support involved in the implementation of their patronage provide a ready explanation for why the bishop relinquished any involvement in Thetford. From Bigod's perspective, St Mary's church provided him with the perfect place for a monastic foundation. It was, once again, an extremely wealthy Anglo-Saxon minster with over 700 acres of land and four churches attached to it,¹⁵² and its evident status explains why it was used by Bishop Herfast as his cathedral when the see was being transferred.¹⁵³ Such a pedigree makes it obvious why Bigod chose Thetford for the development of his set-piece monastic patronage in preference to the family's other priory at Walton in Suffolk, placed inside the Roman shore fort there.¹⁵⁴ With his castle also in Thetford, Bigod was able to develop these conventional twin elements to show his temporal power and spiritual devotion.

¹⁴⁹ Dodwell (ed.), 'Foundation of Norwich Cathedral', p. 7 argues that the foundation charter dates to 1103. The charter is printed in Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, v, p. 148.

¹⁵⁰ *LDB*, fol. 119a.

¹⁵¹ Saunders (ed.), *First Register of Norwich Cathedral Priory*, pp. 26–7.

¹⁵² *LDB*, fol. 118b. The acreage is based on there being 120 acres in a carucate, the Domesday assessment recording six carucates less half a bovat, i.e. 705 acres.

¹⁵³ Some familial involvement is possible as the church was held by the sons of Herfast in 1086. It was from one of these sons, Richard, that Bigod bought the church, according to a fourteenth-century Thetford Priory source, the *Fragmentum Historiae Coenobii Thetfordensis*, attributed to a prior of Thetford, Geoffrey de Rocherio. The account survives in a fifteenth-century manuscript, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 329, which was transcribed and printed by Martin, *History of the Town of Thetford*, appendix, pp. 29–32 no. 6. Geoffrey's time as prior is unclear. According to Blomefield and Parkin, *Essay Towards a Topographical History*, ii, p. 108, his predecessor James de Cusancia was deposed in 1355 'because of his great age', but the source is not given. James was certainly prior in May 1355 when he was named in an *inspeximus* of 15 February 1356, of letters patent granting a corrody to John Chaumplioun of Thetford and Maud his wife: *CPR* 1354–8, p. 340. Geoffrey appears to have had custody as prior from 11 June 1369 until 1371: Smith and London, *Heads of Religious Houses II*, p. 253.

¹⁵⁴ For which see above, pp. 178–9 and nn. 85–6.

Bigod's collaboration with the bishop proved to have a sting in the tail. Thetford Priory had been moved from its original site south of the river to a new location on the Norfolk side to the north, some time before 1107. This move was probably designed in part to relocate the monastery in the economically vibrant part of the town, archaeology demonstrating the abandonment of much of the town to the south in the eleventh century.¹⁵⁵ When Bigod died in 1107, eight days after laying the foundation stone of his new priory church north of the river, Losinga seized the sheriff's body and buried it in Norwich Cathedral. Bigod's family and his monastery made desperate attempts to retrieve the body, bringing an action to the *curia regis*, claiming Roger had declared in his priory's foundation charter his wish to be buried at Thetford, a document that Herbert had witnessed.¹⁵⁶ Their action was to no avail and the body remained in Norwich, a reminder of the bishop's power and a useful metaphor for the deference of secular to spiritual dominion.¹⁵⁷ The Bigod family's anguish is unsurprising. The salvation of Roger's soul would undoubtedly have been considered better provided for in the monastery he had specifically founded for the purpose. Equally upsetting though must have been the loss of the founder's body to the priory which was clearly conceived as being the family's future mausoleum and a crucial symbolic element in the commemoration of their authority and status. Its burial in the cathedral of the diocese can only have been of cold comfort.

The monastic foundations of Herbert de Losinga and Roger Bigod illustrate two particular features. First is the way that monastic establishments could be used actively as representatives of their founder. For Losinga, his cathedral and its priory were 'conceived on a scale which must have appeared overwhelming in contemporary Norwich',¹⁵⁸ actively re-shaping the Anglo-Saxon town and twinning this centre of religious life with a royal castle and borough. His cells carried similarly overt political statements, whether at the centre of vibrant towns like Lynn and Yarmouth, or as a mechanism bringing closure to indigenous

¹⁵⁵ Andrews, *Excavations at Redcastle Furze, Thetford*, p. 138; Rogerson and Dallas, *Excavations in Thetford*, p. 55. For an expanded account of the topography and the move see Pestell, 'Monastic foundation strategies', pp. 225–7.

¹⁵⁶ Two charters of Thetford Priory relate this wish, but both appear spurious. They may be dated 1103×1107 and probably contain genuine elements; while apparently retrospective, they may well have been written as part of Thetford's claims in the subsequent court case. Part of the difficulty in assessing these charters is that the house cartulary in which they appeared was lost in the Cotton Library fire. Abstracts of its charters survive in BL MS Cotton Vitellius F.iv, although Tom Martin's *History of the Town of Thetford*, appendix, no. vii, prints one of the two Bigod charters in its entirety. This charter is edited and reprinted in Harper-Bill (ed.), *English Episcopal Acta VI: Norwich 1070–1214*, no. 21.

¹⁵⁷ The bishop's claim on the body is unclear but because the monks did not move into their new priory church north of the river until 1114, Bigod would almost certainly have been destined for burial in the old church of St Mary, the building previously used as the cathedral. Had Bigod directed his body for burial in St Mary's while it was still a cathedral, Losinga might have claimed he was simply transferring the corpse to its new site, while the family would claim it was the specific church (of St Mary's) that was intended. Alternatively, Bigod may have previously made a declaration to the bishop which his family were later to regret. This is certainly how the court saw it. The writ settling the dispute, dated September 1107 × May 1108, is printed in Davis *et al.* (eds), *Regesta Regum*, ii, no. 886.

¹⁵⁸ Fernie, *Architectural History of Norwich Cathedral*, p. 105.

institutions like St Michael's minster. Roger Bigod's Cluniac priory similarly stood as a potent indication of the sheriff's presence, literally set at the heart of his shrievalty. This declaration is almost certainly the reason why, although Thetford's first monks were sent out from Lewes, the priory was subject to Cluny itself from the start; Bigod's foundation – to be identified with himself – would otherwise have been subordinate to a Warenne institution. Because these monasteries may be identified with the founders themselves, by extension, this informs us of the claims Bigod was making about himself and his family.

The second feature of these various monasteries is the crucial importance of their location in the pursuit of their founders' agenda. While the good documentary and archaeological evidence for all these foundations provides the contextual background to understand the motives for their establishment, such data are frequently not available for most monasteries. It does, however, emphasize the need for the location and topography of religious houses to be examined more critically.

THE TOPOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF EAST ANGLIAN MONASTERIES

Monastic location has been a favourite topic for archaeologists, who have usually been keen to stress the isolation of houses, as communities creating for themselves a new eremitical life in isolation from society like latter-day desert fathers. By the eleventh century, however, all land was owned and even if not occupied was being exploited.¹⁵⁹ There was, then, no such thing as a truly deserted landscape although some enforced depopulations by the Cistercians enabled their creation.¹⁶⁰ For an area like East Anglia with only one Cistercian foundation, Sibton Abbey, the order's influence in such practices might have been minimal. Put another way, if a reforming movement like the Cistercians operated only in studiously isolated locations, this might suggest that locational practices differed elsewhere. To analyse the situation in East Anglia, we may broadly categorise the monasteries into six principal types; urban, reused sites, sites twinned with castles, sites twinned with other manorial centres, 'removed' monasteries and isolated sites.

Urban

The use of conventual houses in urban locations has already been seen in the examples of Norwich and Thetford. A number of other East Anglian houses might be labelled 'urban' by their proximity to built-up areas, although actually located just outside the core of the town. This is a feature of many other regions, for instance Yorkshire.¹⁶¹ Into this urban category we may place the nunneries of

¹⁵⁹ Aston, *Monasteries in the Landscape*, pp. 20–3; Bond, 'Landscapes of monasticism'.

¹⁶⁰ Donkin, *The Cistercians. Studies in the Geography of Medieval England and Wales*, pp. 39–44.

¹⁶¹ Palliser, 'Topography of monastic houses', p. 4.

Carrow (c.1136) and Thetford (1163×1180), which shared near-identical topographical locations, to the south of Norwich and east of Thetford, overlooking meadows adjacent to the Rivers Wensum (Fig. 43) and Little Ouse.¹⁶² In the case of Carrow, this position on the edge of the city may in part be the consequence of its development from a hospital.¹⁶³

Holy Sepulchre Priory in Thetford probably had similar concerns governing its siting. It was established to the south of the river, in an area of the town that was in decline by the twelfth century.¹⁶⁴ Its position, adjacent to the main Bury St Edmunds–Brandon road, was directly opposite the new Cluniac priory across the river in the town and it had its cloister to the north of the church. Since there appear to have been no other factors enforcing this atypical claustral configuration, its layout appears intentional, to enable the church to be physically as near to the road as possible. The Order of the Holy Sepulchre was responsible for maintaining the Sepulchre shrine in Jerusalem, and elsewhere in Europe they ran a number of hospitals and hospital-priories.¹⁶⁵ While Thetford does not appear to have acted in this way, its roadside situation would certainly have allowed an immediate conceptual connection with travellers and pilgrimage. At Hempton in Norfolk, the priory was sited at the end of a dam between Hempton and the market town of Fakenham, a position that reflects its initial foundation as a hospital before conversion to an Augustinian monastery.¹⁶⁶

The only other truly urban monasteries in the region occurred in Ipswich, where two Augustinian priories were founded, by 1133 (Holy Trinity) and before 1188 (SS Peter and Paul).¹⁶⁷ Their presence conformed to a wider, national, pattern of urban habitation, principally by the Benedictines and the Augustinians.¹⁶⁸ The involvement of the latter may relate to the Augustinians' origins as a proselytizing order, expressed by their first wave of foundations (1100–35) being directed towards the towns of southern England; those houses in the north both

¹⁶² The intention behind Carrow's foundation dates to 1136 × March 1137 when King Stephen granted 25s of land in the fields of Norwich to the church of SS Mary and John to found a church: Davis *et al.* (eds), *Regesta Regum*, iii, no. 615. St George's Priory, Thetford, was founded apparently from a cell of Bury St Edmunds monks living in St George's church during the abbacy of Hugh in 1157–80. The foundation charter is printed in Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, iv, pp. 477–8. Thompson, *Women Religious*, pp. 69 and 230 dates the foundation 1163×1180 but Harper-Bill (ed.), *English Episcopal Acta VI: Norwich 1070–1214*, App. I no. 44 gives c.1160. To be cautious, I have adopted the wider date bracket.

¹⁶³ The origin of this convent as a hospital derives from Carrow tradition. The house cartulary is now lost, but a transcription made in the sixteenth century by Tanner records that the house was founded in 1146 by sisters Seyna and Lescelina *de hospite sanctae Mariae et Sancti Johannis*: Tanner MS 342, fol. 149v, printed in Rye, *Carrow Abbey*, as Appendix i. For the close relationship between nuns, women and hospitals, see Thompson, *Women Religious*, pp. 38–53 and Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, pp. 172–6.

¹⁶⁴ Above p. 191 n. 155.

¹⁶⁵ Daniel, 'Order of the Holy Sepulchre', unpublished; Dickinson, *Origin of the Austin Canons*, pp. 83–4.

¹⁶⁶ The priory was founded *temp.* Stephen: Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, vi (1), p. 571.

¹⁶⁷ Holy Trinity was founded by 1133, the latest possible date for the charter of Henry I: Davis *et al.* (eds), *Regesta Regum*, ii, no. 1783. See also Lewis, 'King and Eye', p. 581 n. 4. SS Peter and Paul had been founded by October 1198 when a charter confirming the benefice of Creetingham church to the canons was issued by the bishop of Norwich, John de Oxford: Harper-Bill (ed.), *English Episcopal Acta VI: Norwich 1070–1214*, no. 247.

¹⁶⁸ Trenholm, *English Monastic Boroughs*.

before and after this time appear to have been more rural and contemplative.¹⁶⁹ The picture from East Anglia supports this model. Holy Trinity was founded in this first wave, and like many other examples, was based on an existing parish church, also of the Holy Trinity, recorded in Domesday Book as belonging to Alwulf the priest with twenty-six acres in alms.¹⁷⁰ More intriguing is that Ipswich came to have a second Augustinian priory. In some respects it was curious that the first monastic foundation had not been made at SS Peter and Paul. Domesday reveals the church of St Peter (the name occasionally used for the priory itself) to have held six carucates of land as a manor, valued at fifteen pounds in 1086, an endowment outstripping even St Mary's, Thetford.¹⁷¹ The church may well have been attached to the royal vill of Bramford just outside Ipswich, as Roger Bigod claimed in 1086.¹⁷² That St Peter's should have been a wealthy minster is hardly surprising given Ipswich's position as the fourth major urban centre in East Anglia next to Norwich, Thetford and Bury St Edmunds. Perhaps more surprising is the fact that the church had not been refounded into a conventual community until 1188. Some surviving status to the church is suggested by its subsequently coming to have a monastic cell at Letheringham in Suffolk, founded c.1194.¹⁷³

Reused sites

As a number of the monasteries already discussed have demonstrated, an important consideration in the siting of religious communities was continuity. This issue has long beguiled historians and archaeologists, whose sources of data are frequently too patchy to demonstrate a clear continuum between the early establishment of some form of community and the appearance of an institution much later. While empty claims for continuity must be avoided, the frequency of examples proves that the presence of Anglo-Saxon antecedents could have an important role in structuring where full monastic communities were to be founded. In turn, this indicates a potential restriction on the freedom a founder or a community had to choose where to site their monastery. The influence is most strong in the earlier post-Conquest period, especially if the 'land grant' alien houses are discounted (Fig. 34). After c.1107, with the foundation of Wymondham, there is a brief lapse with the number of existing communities regularised, picking up again in the 1150s with the foundation of Mendham, Wormegay, Butley and Ipswich SS Peter and Paul. Some caution is needed: a smattering of such conversions continued in the intervening period with the regularisation of Blythburgh c.1120 and Hoxne by 1130. The principal difficulty, of course, is finding credible evidence to demonstrate the former presence of Anglo-Saxon religious foundations. Perhaps the best example of a site where a former community can be

¹⁶⁹ Postles, 'Austin canons in English towns', pp. 2–3.

¹⁷⁰ *LDB*, fol. 290a.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 342b.

¹⁷² For Bramford see also Chapter 2, pp. 52–3 and Chapter 4, p. 127.

¹⁷³ The priory of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Letheringham was founded by William de Boville: Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, vi (1), pp. 596–7; Blatchley, 'Lost and mutilated memorials', p. 168.

posited without any documentary evidence, and which was subsequently refounded as a monastic house, is Wymondham.

At Domesday, this massive parish of 10,950 acres contained eighty-eight sokemen and was considered a half-hundred in its own right; today it has a 'contact score' of nineteen adjoining parishes (Fig. 44).¹⁷⁴ If any parish in Norfolk could be said to preserve evidence of an Anglo-Saxon estate this is surely it. The fact that the extensive Domesday entries for Wymondham fail even to mention any church here underlines the danger in over-reliance upon this documentary source. Yet, for an estate of this size, a minster church would almost certainly have been attached. It would be surprising if such a church was anywhere other than the site subsequently occupied by the priory, not least as it provides an explanation for why the priory church continued to discharge parochial functions.¹⁷⁵

Other instances of underlying Anglo-Saxon minsters are less certain but remain the most favourable explanation. Walsingham, for example, is most frequently cited as having been founded by Sir Geoffrey de Fervaques but based on a chapel dedicated to the Annunciation of Our Lady established in 1061 by Geoffrey's mother.¹⁷⁶ The source for this tradition is a Book of Hours, which follows a ballad about the house published by Richard Pynson, in or soon after 1496.¹⁷⁷ Since the priory foundation charter shows that the establishment of the Augustinian community can be placed c.1153, it seemed as though Dickinson was correct in dismissing this evidence for an earlier priestly community as much later, untrustworthy, house tradition.¹⁷⁸ However, Domesday Book reveals that among the lands of Ranulf Peverel his manor of Walsingham included one church with sixty acres.¹⁷⁹ Since the average valuation by acreage for a Norfolk church in Domesday Book is about twenty acres, an above average church is suggested, and one probably with a community attached. Apparent confirmation of this comes from the foundation charter of Binham Priory (by 1093) where appearing in the witness list are *Asketel et Alwold et Wimundo presbyteris de Walsingham*.¹⁸⁰

The mention of three priests for a church with three times the typical provision of land suggests that Walsingham's house tradition was indeed accurate. It suggests why an Augustinian priory came to be founded at Walsingham, which has little to commend itself as having been an early estate centre; indeed its parish boundaries suggest fission from a multiple-estate probably to the north, Wighton being a royal manor in 1086 and the hundredal manor for North Greenhoe (Fig. 45).¹⁸¹ Binham similarly has little evidence to support it as being a former

¹⁷⁴ Williamson, *Origins of Norfolk*, pp. 96–9.

¹⁷⁵ A situation that led to the abbey church's substantial nave being saved at the Dissolution for the use of the parishioners. Parochial involvement also led to competitive building with the community's large axial church tower being overlooked by a 142 feet (43.3 m) high bell tower to the west end of the nave, built by the laity and completed in about 1498: Pevsner and Wilson, *Buildings of England: Norfolk 2: North-West and South*, pp. 792–6.

¹⁷⁶ *VCH Norfolk*, ii, p. 394.

¹⁷⁷ Dickinson, *Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham*, pp. 4–7 and 132–3.

¹⁷⁸ The charter is printed in Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, vi (1), p. 73.

¹⁷⁹ *LDB*, fol. 254a.

¹⁸⁰ Printed in Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, iii, p. 346.

¹⁸¹ *LDB*, fols 112b and 113a–b.

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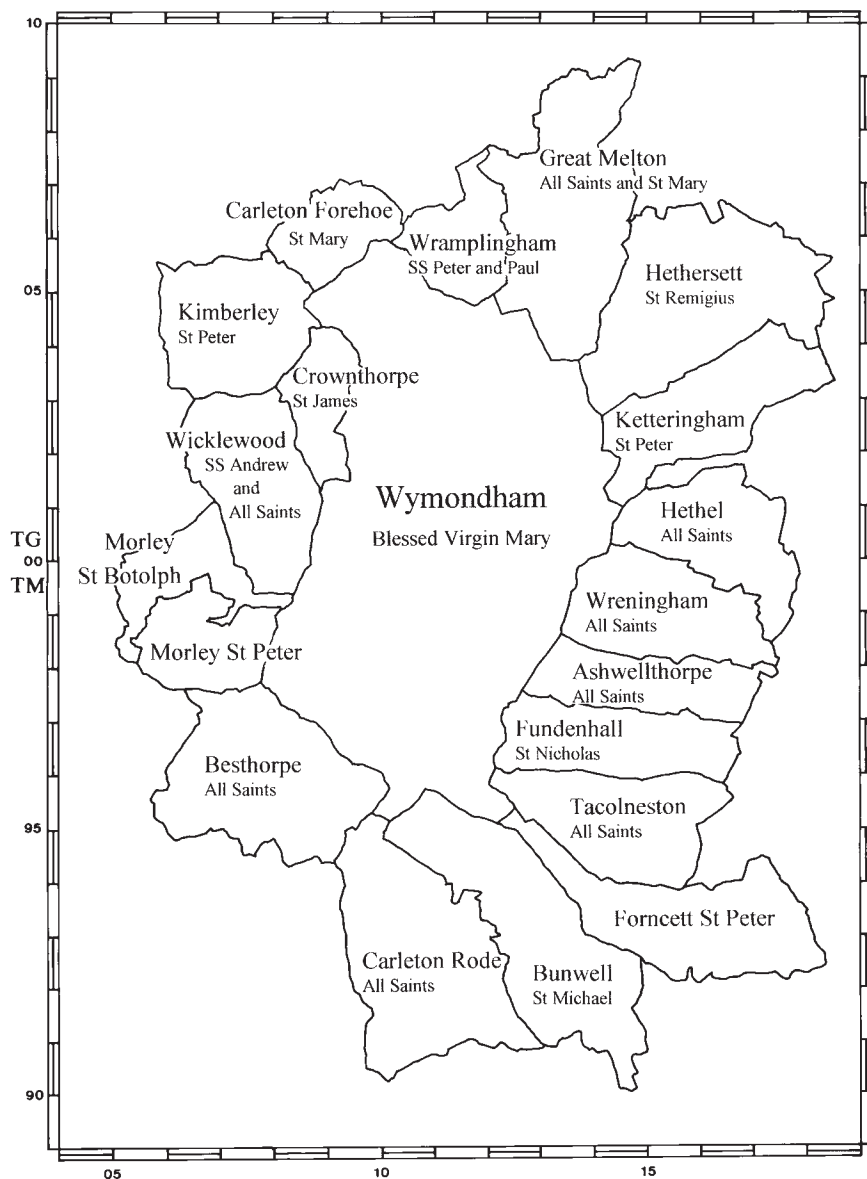


Fig. 44. The boundaries of Wymondham, Norfolk, and its surrounding parishes.

Anglo-Saxon minster, or perhaps having an earlier history as a *monasterium*. It is, however, a regularly shaped parish which forms an even more rectangular parcel with neighbouring Hindringham. Given the early foundation of Binham Priory, as well as the fact that the monastery was based on a parish church which it shared, it would be unsurprising if this had not held some pre-Conquest significance. The case is, however, unprovable on the present evidence.¹⁸²

¹⁸² A possible explanation is that the Binham/Hindringham land parcel was originally of some tenorial

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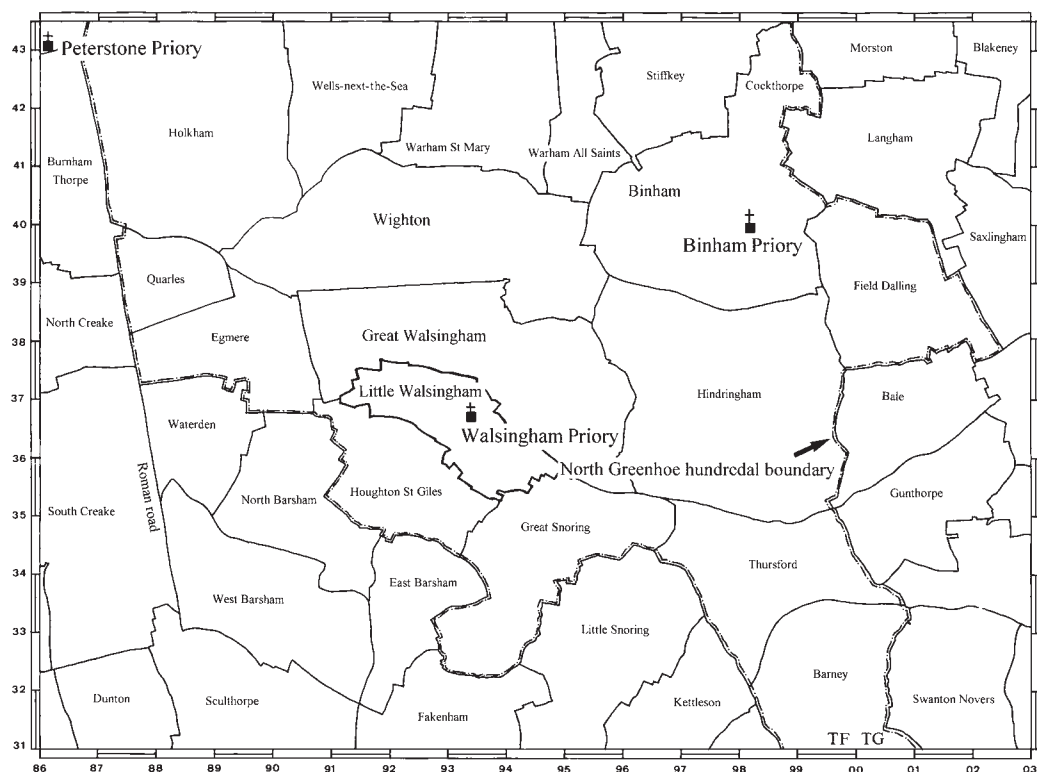


Fig. 45. The boundaries of Walsingham, Norfolk, and its surrounding parishes.

Other locations have similarly tantalising evidence. At Rudham in north-west Norfolk, metal-detecting has revealed unusually high concentrations of Anglo-Saxon metalwork of above average quality and quantity.¹⁸³ No single ‘productive’ site as such has been suggested, but the accumulating assemblage appears to be a genuine concentration, notwithstanding the fact that the area has perhaps been better detected than many others.¹⁸⁴ It is instructive to note Rudham’s Domesday entry, still undivided into East and West Rudham, although some partition is perhaps suggested by the mention of two churches with sixty acres. The breakdown of the valuation of these – whether thirty acres each or an uneven division – is unclear, but a third church without land indicates a likely chapel of ease attached to one.¹⁸⁵ Rudham also formed the centre of a soke which had six outlying estates at Domesday, with a population of fifty-two sokemen in total, who witnessed a charter of c.1140–70 in the Castle Acre cartulary.¹⁸⁶ In

importance, as a ‘productive’ site of eighth- and ninth-century date has been discovered at Hindringham. See further Pestell, ‘The afterlife’, pp. 129–30.

¹⁸³ Rogerson, ‘Six outstanding Middle Anglo-Saxon sites’, pp. 116–18.

¹⁸⁴ Gurney, ‘A note on the distribution’, p. 531.

¹⁸⁵ *LDB*, fols 169a–b.

¹⁸⁶ The charter (BL Harleian MS 2110, fol. 39v) is printed by Douglas, *Social Structure of Medieval East Anglia*, Appendix I, no. 32.

such a centre it would occasion no surprise to find that a monastic community might be seen as desirable and indeed one was founded, as Coxford Priory, in 1135×1144 by William Cheney.¹⁸⁷

Finally, two more instances of post-Conquest monasteries occurring where important Middle Anglo-Saxon sites have been found are Burnham in Norfolk and Butley in Suffolk. At Burnham, Peterstone Priory was founded by 1200, probably by an ancestor of the Cheney family.¹⁸⁸ Burnham appears to have been a large multiple-estate, before breaking up into nine constituent parishes. Domesday Book reveals that a large manor was held by the king in Burnham Overy, to which was attached a church which today survives as a cruciform late eleventh-century structure with central crossing tower.¹⁸⁹ Substantial quantities of Middle Anglo-Saxon material have been recovered by fieldwalking and metal-detection, including imported Continental pottery, and fifteen coins including *sceattas* and a *denier* of Louis the Pious (822–40).¹⁹⁰ At Butley, the Augustinian priory of St Mary was founded by Rannulf de Glanville in 1171.¹⁹¹ Although the evidence of Domesday Book is unexceptional, archaeological excavation has revealed traces of a high-status Middle Anglo-Saxon site at Burrow Hill, just under a mile from the priory.¹⁹²

It seems unlikely to be coincidence that Burnham and Butley, like Rudham, should all just happen to have priories established in them after the Conquest.¹⁹³ Instead, we can see several instances of post-Conquest monasteries that appear to owe their origins to centres which had an importance in the Anglo-Saxon period. Understanding the nature of this importance is not always clear, as the example of Butley shows. Similarly, it is difficult to argue that such sites maintained their importance through the Late Anglo-Saxon period into the eleventh and twelfth centuries because our archaeological knowledge is still very imperfect and documentary sources are patchy at best. In several instances, only a late (and in Walsingham's case a very late) tradition of Anglo-Saxon religious occupation survives.

Nevertheless, the nature of certain places being artefactually 'productive', of above average wealth, and coinciding with post-Conquest monasteries, inevitably raises the possibility that in some cases a continuity of religious occupation, or perhaps even a tradition of sanctity of site, had been maintained. This would certainly be consistent with the case that the influence of the Vikings in terminating the existence of religious communities has been overstated.¹⁹⁴ The

¹⁸⁷ The priory was founded *temp.* Stephen, and by 1144 when the gift of land in Stanhoe by Cheney was confirmed in a bull of Pope Lucius III, dated 4 April 1144: Davis *et al.* (eds), *Regesta Regum*, iii, no. 247.

¹⁸⁸ The priory was always small and its early history is obscure but it was in existence by 1200 when the church of Beeston in Norfolk was appropriated to the priory: *VCH Norfolk*, ii, p. 391; Heywood, 'Priory of St Mary in the Meadow'.

¹⁸⁹ *LDB*, fol. 128a. For the church see Pevsner and Wilson, *Buildings of England: Norfolk 2: North-West and South*, pp. 231–2.

¹⁹⁰ Rogerson, 'Six outstanding Middle Anglo-Saxon sites', pp. 114–15.

¹⁹¹ Mortimer (ed.), *Leiston Abbey Cartulary*, pp. 1–3.

¹⁹² Fenwick, 'Insula de Burgh'.

¹⁹³ This argument is set out in more detail in Pestell, 'The afterlife', esp. at pp. 133–7.

¹⁹⁴ See Chapter 3, pp. 98–100.

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alternative, that there was no continuous strand of religious life at these places, is no less interesting. It suggests that certain locations had maintained an importance making them emerge in the post-Conquest period as likely or apposite locations for conventual foundations. In these circumstances, Late Anglo-Saxon communities would have been equally obvious targets for reformist Anglo-Norman piety. Under these terms of reference, paradoxically, we may see an effective restriction in the freedom of choice available to patrons and inmates for siting a monastery.

Castles and monasteries

The twinning of castles and monasteries within the landscape has long been recognised, its importance lying in the way founding families were able to stress the duality of their temporal and spiritual power.¹⁹⁵ For the relationship to be most effective, the priory was required to be within immediate sight of the castle, or at least as a part of a planned landscape. For the fulfilment of such designs, a range of factors was needed. First, the family needed the wherewithal to raise a castle, and the wealth to do this clearly provided a restriction upon the numbers of such twinings. Second, the great phase of castle building, to develop prestige complexes as opposed to their needs in periods of war (as during the Anarchy of Stephen's reign), largely occurred soon after the Conquest. Unsurprisingly, of the ten castle/monastery relationships in East Anglia, seven existed by 1107 (at Eye, Castle Acre, Stoke-by-Clare, Walton, Thetford, Horsham and Wymondham).

The subsequent construction of Buckenham, Bungay and Wormegay appears to be directed at aping the actions of the previous generation, although of these, Buckenham is a rather indistinct, perhaps lacklustre, twinning; the Augustinian priory actually came to occupy the site of William d'Albini's first castle, his new residence being built a mile and a half away at New Buckenham. In this instance the twinning might be interpreted as an appreciation of the convention for such a relationship. As a mark of his status, as well as his piety, both secular and ecclesiastical components were needed. However, the space laid out around his new castle, planned town and deerpark may have led him to consider that the needs of a monastery could be met most economically by locating it on the old castle site.¹⁹⁶

These monasteries also show the tensions that might exist between patron and brethren. In the cases of Eye, Castle Acre, Stoke-by-Clare and Walton – four of the seven earliest – the original monastic community subsequently moved to another location outside the castle.¹⁹⁷ Whether this related to the desires of the

¹⁹⁵ Thompson, 'Associated monasteries and castles in the Middle Ages'.

¹⁹⁶ The Waltham Chronicler was certainly little impressed by William d'Albini. Following his marriage to Henry I's widow in 1138, he 'became arrogant and inordinately conceited . . . and anything that our world possessed that was special, apart from the king, was worthless in his eyes': Watkiss and Chibnall (eds), *The Waltham Chronicle*, pp. 76–9. The cynic might wonder how enthusiastic Albini's religious patronage was. At his second, centrepiece, castle at Rising in west Norfolk, the only religious institution made in association with the new town and deerpark was a leper house, an infinitely cheaper form of foundation than a priory.

¹⁹⁷ Horsham St Faith Priory possibly constitutes a fifth. This Benedictine cell of Conques, established

community or patron is less certain. Both, in their developed forms, needed more space than available in the immediate area of a motte and bailey, but near enough for their duality to remain recognisable. The monastery that relocated furthest away from its castle was Stoke-by-Clare, at a distance of two miles. However, this was probably because the new location enabled the priory to be placed on an extant minster site.¹⁹⁸

Although the combination of castle and monastery is familiar, its connotations have perhaps been overstressed due to the impressive nature of Norman castles. The landscapes surrounding these lordly centres are now becoming better understood and their material culture, let alone their size, is a dramatic reminder of the Norman elite's exploitation of new landholdings in the years after 1066.¹⁹⁹ However, the situation in Later Anglo-Saxon England is similarly becoming clearer. In particular, the configuration of the thegnly *burh* with its hall, church, *burh-geat* and bellhouse is increasingly recognised and can be seen to have been reworked and modified by the incoming Norman aristocracy.²⁰⁰ In this way 'a more explicit allusion to Anglo-Saxon power symbolism was soon made, not later than c.1100 . . . Brash *Normannitas* thus gave way to an English emblem of lordly power.'²⁰¹

This helps to explain why castles themselves frequently seem to have been founded upon Late Anglo-Saxon centres, as has been demonstrated by excavation at Goltho, Lincolnshire and seen also at Pevensey in Sussex and Witham in Essex.²⁰² It also suggests monastic establishments were as likely to relate to seigneurial centres of slightly lower status which, without the more durable construction of a castle, may be less readily visible today.

Other lordly centres

If the relationship between castles and monasteries had as much to do with the creation of planned landscapes as with salvation, there is no reason to believe that those religious houses without castle-building patrons were perceived any differently in symbolic terms. This is perhaps nowhere more clear than in the use of parish churches upon which to settle a religious community. Of the 71

c.1105 by Robert and Sybil FitzWalter, was originally founded at 'Kirkcroft' in neighbouring Horstead, before being moved to Horsham. Unfortunately, this site is now lost and so it is unclear how close to the castle the priory originally lay. The story of the priory's foundation and the transfer of the site come from a late sixteenth-century manuscript once in the possession of a Sampson Leonard, fol. 180. It is printed in Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, iii, p. 636.

¹⁹⁸ Above, p. 178 n. 84.

¹⁹⁹ See for instance Creighton, 'Castles and landscapes' and 'Early castles and rural settlement patterns', especially at pp. 31–2.

²⁰⁰ Williams, 'A bell-house and a *burh-geat*'. For a possible excavated example of a *burh-geat* see Richards *et al.*, 'Cottam', pp. 94–5. The implied status required of those with a bell house and *burh-geat* is revealed in an eleventh-century compilation on status of c.1002–23, in which 'if a *ceorl* prospers, that he possessed fully five hides of land of his own, a bell and a *burh-geat*, a seat and special office in the king's hall, then was he henceforth entitled to the rights of a thegn': *EHD*, i, no. 52.

²⁰¹ Coulson, 'Peaceable power', p. 93.

²⁰² Beresford, *Goltho*; Aldsworth and Freke, *Historic Towns in Sussex*, pp. 46–7; Rodwell, *Origins and Early Development of Witham*, pp. 64–5 and 85–7.

monasteries of East Anglia, 11 (15.49%) shared their church with parishioners,²⁰³ and this proportion rises to 18.96% if those 13 alien priories acting substantially as land grants are omitted (above, pp. 171–5). While this means that nearly one in five monastic communities in the region had their church also discharging parochial functions, many more had locations either adjacent to, or close by, parochial churches. Examples such as Horsham St Faith were so immediately adjacent that they must have appeared to be almost part of the same complex (Fig. 46). These arrangements illustrate how the presence of a religious community was, at least in East Anglia, frequently bound into secular society, even if its personnel were ostensibly shielded within their cloister. Once again, the location of these monasteries must have been intimately involved with the desires of the founder as well as in some measure reflecting the will of the monastic community. The relationship with the founder is of particular interest in considering the proximity of parish churches, and Richard Morris has made a strong case for the intimate relationship between seigneurial parish church foundations and manorial centres. He has accepted that not all churches were founded next to the lord's hall, but that 'on the whole . . . it is seigneurial considerations which seem likely to have been most prevalent'.²⁰⁴ As David Dymond has pointed out, of 52 isolated churches in west Suffolk, at least 36 (69.2%) stand beside existing halls or moated sites.²⁰⁵ If this is indicative of a wider pattern, it suggests that lordly residences are also likely to be close to monastic foundations and that again there is some notion of the twinning of the monastery with a seigneurial residence, albeit on a less exalted scale than with castles.²⁰⁶

This proximate relationship is visible in diverse orders: Cluniacs, Benedictines, Augustinians and Knights Hospitaller, and in both male and female communities. It is this so *uncontroversial* nature of co-existence that makes other monasteries in East Anglia, where we can see a very specific choice of what may be perceived a 'remote' location, so interesting.

'Removed' monasteries

The choice of the Cistercians to settle in remote or inhospitable sites has been well chronicled, and other reforming orders of the eleventh and twelfth centuries have also been seen to have had this desire. With Sibton the only Cistercian monastery in the region by 1200, and no Tironensian or Savigniac houses,²⁰⁷ such orders are under-represented in the area although Premonstratensian houses did exist at Langley and West Dereham in Norfolk and at Leiston in Suffolk. All were

²⁰³ This excludes Thetford St Mary. Although the priory was founded in the old cathedral, there is no evidence for the priory church showing a parochial function.

²⁰⁴ Morris, *Churches in the Landscape*, p. 268.

²⁰⁵ Dymond, 'Suffolk landscape', p. 29.

²⁰⁶ An intermediate example is at Weeting in Norfolk. Here a 'castle', more accurately a twelfth-century hall-house, was twinned with the Augustinian priory of Bromehill, founded some time before 1224 by Sir Hugh de Plaiz: Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses*, p. 150. For the hall see Heslop, 'Weeting Castle'.

²⁰⁷ With the exception of the alien Savigniac house founded at Field Dalling in Norfolk which, as has already been seen, is better interpreted as a land grant.

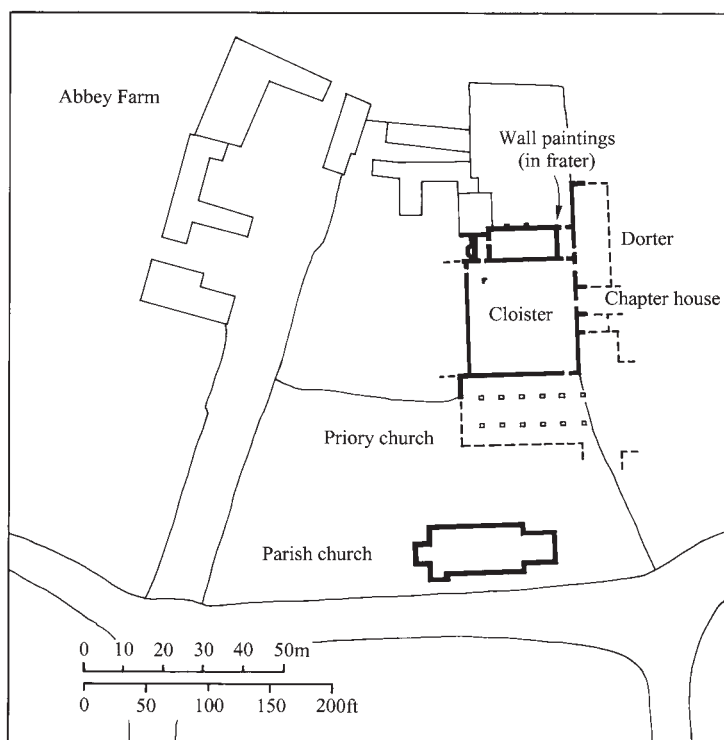


Fig. 46. The position of St Faith's Priory, Norfolk, in relation to the parish church (after Sherlock, 'Discoveries at Horsham St Faith').

isolated from occupation, Leiston being founded on an island in the middle of marshland (Plate 11).²⁰⁸ The double house of Gilbertines at Shouldham in Norfolk appears to have been similarly isolated.²⁰⁹ Fieldwalking has demonstrated that the parish church, sited on high ground near to the priory site, was surrounded by Anglo-Saxon occupation. The absence of any Local Medieval Unglazed or Grimston-type wares, dating between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, suggests that at some point, probably in the twelfth century, settlement moved to the present village green site in a nearby valley.²¹⁰ Whether this was a result of deliberate depopulation directed by the priory or part of a more common

²⁰⁸ Or at least the site of the first house was, founded c.1182 on a small, low, island set within extensive marshland at Minsmere. The coastal location and low-lying nature of the site led to such problems with marine incursions that the priory was moved to its present site about two miles further inland, c.1363.

²⁰⁹ Shouldham was founded by Geoffrey FitzPeter 1193×1199. The foundation charter witness list is no later than 1200 and in styling himself Earl of Essex, Geoffrey's charter might appear to date after 27 May 1199 when he was created earl: Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order*, pp. 240–3. However, the Walden Chronicler places Shouldham, 'the foundation of which he had ill-advisedly begun', before the death of Geoffrey's sister, Beatrice de Say, who died in 1197 at the latest: Greenway and Watkiss (eds), *The Book of the Foundation of Walden Monastery*, pp. 122–3 and 148–9. Geoffrey was either using his title rather early or, more probably, the foundation charter is later than the actual establishment of the priory. The charter is printed in Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, vi (2), pp. 974–5.

²¹⁰ I am grateful to Mr John Smallwood for information about the fieldwalking.

settlement drift to village greens, as occurred over much of East Anglia at this time, is uncertain.²¹¹ Regardless, the priory was built in an unpopulated location.

While it appears that reformist orders wished for isolation of location, they were not alone. Among the older orders, which have often been seen closely involved with secular society, many foundations by the mid-twelfth century also appear to have been striving for more isolation. As an example, the Augustinian priory of Hickling in Norfolk was founded in 1185 by Theobald de Valognes.²¹² The site chosen was a sixty-two acre, near-circular, area of land called *Erveslund*, which rises to form an island among the low-lying surrounding marshland (Plate 9).²¹³ The eighteenth-century Norfolk antiquarian Armstrong noted:

the ruins of the priory, which are many, stand on a rising ground totally surrounded by fen-lands, and to which there are now only two approaches by causeways; one from Palling, the other from Hickling.²¹⁴

Circumstantial evidence suggests that Hickling may once have been an estate centre. The place-name is intriguing, using the *-icklinga* element found elsewhere in East Anglia and associated by some with the survival of Late Roman communities or with the formation of an early Anglo-Saxon kingdom under Icel in the fifth and sixth centuries.²¹⁵ A more conservative reading, that the name represents '*Hicel(a)*'s people', still suggests a relatively early Anglo-Saxon origin.²¹⁶ An archaic focus may be bolstered by the adjoining village being called Ingham, a familiar placename element normally explained as '*Inga's ham*'. However, an alternative explanation has, perhaps ambitiously, suggested that the first element may be a term for an Anglian king of the Ingwionic dynasty, and that the land is a former royal estate.²¹⁷ The possibility that Hickling originated as a multiple-estate centre is consonant with the large size of the parish, extending over 4,244 acres.²¹⁸ This is nearly as large as North Walsham (at 4,252 acres), another Anglo-Saxon estate centre nearby.²¹⁹ Domesday Book adds little, Hickling church having an entirely average twenty acres attached and a valuation of 20d,

²¹¹ Williamson, *Origins of Norfolk*, pp. 167–8; Davison, *Evolution of Settlement in Three Parishes*, pp. 67–8.

²¹² The foundation date comes from the thirteenth-century Holm St Benet's *Chronica Minor*, printed in Ellis (ed.), *Chronica Johannis de Oxenides*, p. 433, for which see Chapter 4, pp. 142–5 and nn. 192–3. A copy of this house chronicle, now in the collection of the duke of Newcastle, was subsequently maintained by the canons at Hickling Priory. It adds in the margin the detail that Alexander was the first prior, four canons from St Osyth's Priory being sent to instruct the brethren. A history of the house is given in Chifferiel, *Records of Hickling Priory*.

²¹³ For the name see Harper-Bill (ed.), *English Episcopal Acta VI: Norwich 1070–1214*, no. 226.

²¹⁴ Armstrong, *History and Antiquities of Norfolk*, vii, p. 29. The priory buildings appear to have been in ruins for some time already as a document of c.1640, among suit papers concerning James Scamler's purchase of the property from John Calthorpe, refers to 'howses in great decay . . . the upland groundes . . . overgrowne': NRO: Frere MSS NAS/1/1/12/16, shelf A 196–7. I am grateful to Mr Paul Rutledge for bringing this reference to my attention.

²¹⁵ Scarfe, 'Place-name Icklingham', pp. 127–31; Morris, *The Age of Arthur*, pp. 271–3.

²¹⁶ Ekwall, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, p. 238; Gelling, 'A chronology for Suffolk place-names', pp. 54–5.

²¹⁷ Sandred, 'Ingham in East Anglia'.

²¹⁸ Approximately 296 acres of this is now water, being the flooded medieval peat working called Hickling Broad.

²¹⁹ Lawson, *The Archaeology of Witton*, pp. 74–7 and Chapter 4, p. 142.



Plate 9. The marshland island forming Hickling Priory precinct, Norfolk, 12 July 1990. The farm buildings stand over parts of the claustral west range. Photograph D. A. Edwards/ copyright Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service.

although it seems to have had at least one subject chapel from an early date, dedicated to St Mary and sited in the churchyard.²²⁰ The location of this chapel is certainly reminiscent of the double-church arrangements seen in several Anglo-Saxon *monasteria*.²²¹

These details make it equivocal as to whether Hickling was of any particular importance in the twelfth century. Understanding the nature of the island chosen for the priory is similarly difficult. It is, in itself, not especially remote but its position, within marshland, echoes many Anglo-Saxon religious foundations both of the tenth-century monastic reform and earlier. In an effort to determine whether the medieval monastery was in fact based directly upon an earlier site, all evidence for the former topography of the site was plotted from cartographic sources and aerial photographs (Fig. 47).²²² These revealed a number of features

²²⁰ Blomefield and Parkin, *An Essay towards a Topographical History of Norfolk*, ix, p. 307.

²²¹ For the difficulties of double church arrangements in an East Anglian context see Chapter 2, pp. 50–2. The description of St Mary's as a chapel perhaps indicates that it was not a second parish church in the same churchyard, although this is possible, there having been two manors in Hickling, of Overhall and Netherhall.

²²² The cartographic evidence is sadly limited, beginning in 1797 with Faden's map of Norfolk (reproduced by the Norfolk Records Society, volume 42 (1975); no editor noted). Then follow the 1808 Enclosure award (PRO: C. xxi Parchment MS), the 1842 Tithe Award map (NRO: DN/TA 748), the 1885 Ordnance Survey 2-inch map and subsequent revisions. A plan of the priory ruins, drawn in

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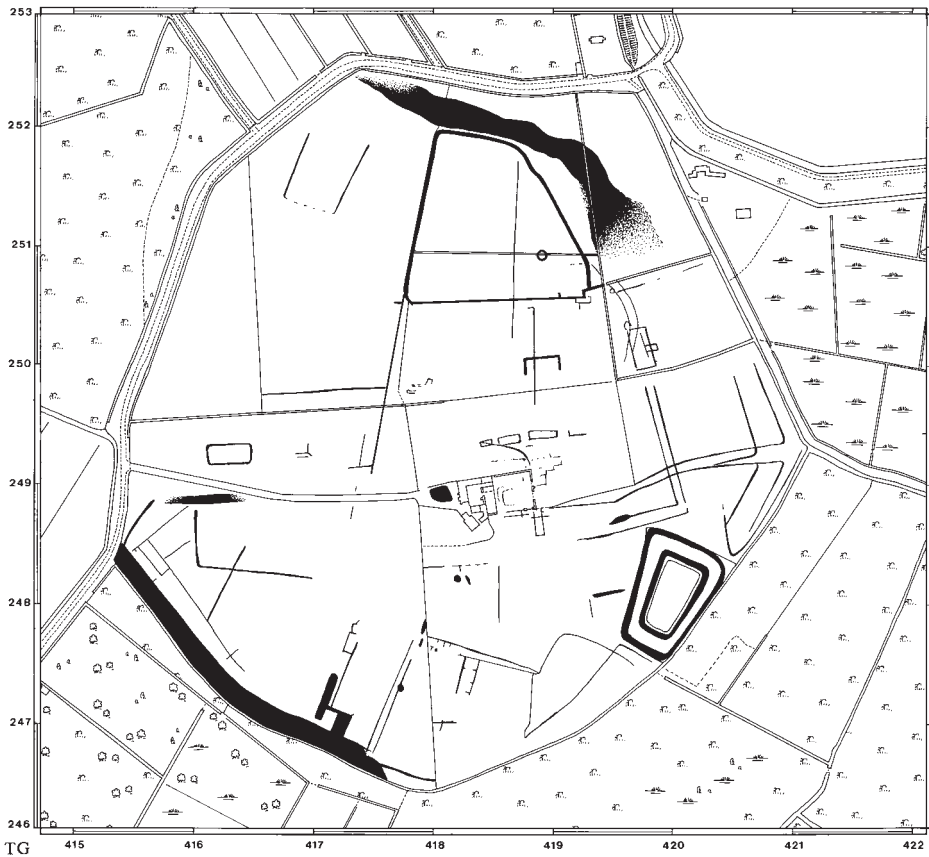


Fig. 47. Hickling Priory, Norfolk. Precinct as reconstructed from aerial photographs and cartographic evidence.

including an enclosure to the north of the priory, and a line of rectilinear features running east-west immediately to the north of the priory church, not dissimilar to the axially aligned buildings found on many high-status Middle Anglo-Saxon sites. The vast majority of the island is today arable farmland, and was subjected to a programme of intensive fieldwalking.²²³

Surface collection of material was undertaken using a 25×25-metre grid, with four transects per box, in ideal conditions. In all, some 54 acres of the 62-acre site, or 87% of the entire island, were walked. The results demonstrate that the priory was a *de novo* settlement on the island; not even one sherd of Roman or

August 1920 by G. Colman Green and now held in Norwich Castle Museum, is fundamentally flawed in its reconstruction, placing the nave of the church within the cloister area. An accurate scaled groundplan was made in 1991 by the RCHME: *Hickling Priory, Hickling, Norfolk. Historic Building Report*. The aerial photographs used were: Cambridge University Air Photo Library OH 38-9 and 42-4, and Norfolk Landscape Archaeology collection TG4124/A/AML 12; /AE/DCT 24-7; /D/DQY 8-9; /N/GDD 9; /J/GDE 1 and 10; and /AA/GMB 1.

²²³ Undertaken by the author in the autumn and spring of 1998-9, with the kind co-operation of the farmer and landowner Mr Mark Harris.

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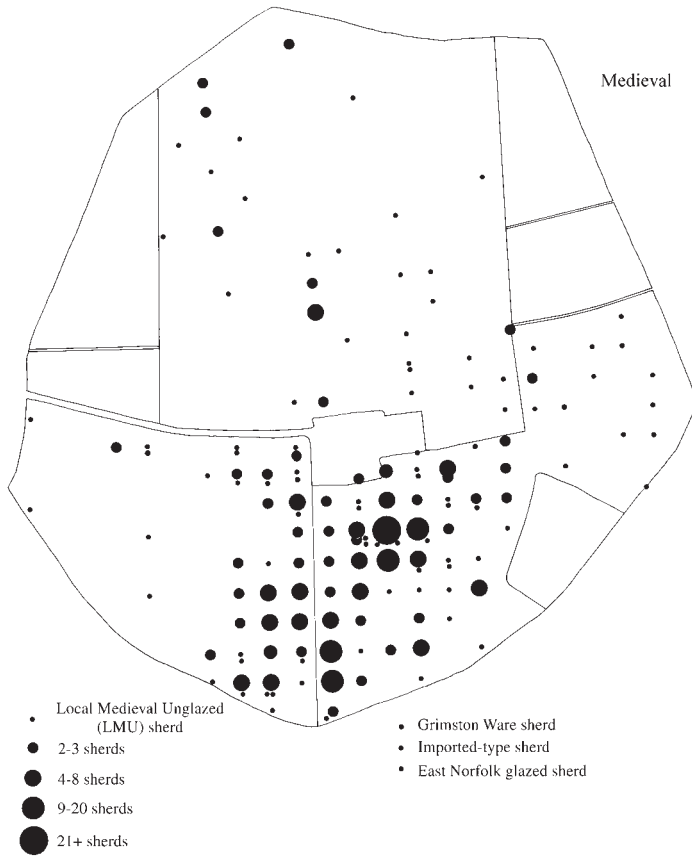


Fig. 48. The distribution of twelfth- to fourteenth-century Local Medieval Unglazed pottery located in fieldwalking at Hickling Priory, Norfolk.

Anglo-Saxon material was found in the survey, compared to the copious amount of medieval pottery beginning with the Local Medieval Unglazed (LMU) ceramic tradition, which dates from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries (Fig. 48). Thereafter, the ceramic sequence continued with Late Medieval/Transitional glazed wares of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with a small amount of contemporary stoneware, and post-medieval Glazed Red Earthenwares (GRE) and stonewares, before ending with modern china and porcelain.²²⁴

The fieldwalking results make it clear that a specific choice had been made to place the new Augustinian community on the island just to the north of the village church. While it is uncertain whether a community of secular priests ever existed at Hickling to be refounded as a fully conventual priory, this is certainly a possibility. Regardless, the new monastery had been deliberately placed to the north of the existing medieval settlement, on an unoccupied island. In fact, this

²²⁴ These finds and their distribution plots are outlined more fully in Pestell, 'An analysis of monastic foundation', pp. 265–72 and figs 5.16–5.22. I hope to publish these results separately in the near future.

arrangement appears to be replicated at various other sites. A particularly clear example occurred at Mendham.

As we have already seen, an Anglo-Saxon religious community existed here by at least 951,²²⁵ and judging by the complex Domesday Book entries, had been maintained until at least 1086.²²⁶ By 1155 a Cluniac priory had been founded in Mendham as a cell of Castle Acre, by William de Huntingfield.²²⁷ The location chosen for this establishment was not the parish church, as had happened with the Cluniacs at nearby Wangford, although Mendham was a minster church with a large surrounding churchyard. Instead, an island site set in the marshland of the Waveney valley was chosen, reached by a broad causeway. The site is overlooked to the north, south and east by steeply rising valley sides which enabled clear intervisibility between the priory and the church/village. That the site was an island when the priory was founded is made explicit in William de Huntingfield's foundation charter, which describes the priory community as *servientibus insulam sanctae Mariae de Mendham*.²²⁸ The priory had therefore been sited away from lay society but in experiential terms was clearly not divorced from it. Instead, the priory remained intimately visible within the landscape, where it could be kept to the fore in the minds of men. A third example of an island site reinforces this concept.

At Wormegay, an Augustinian priory was established 1166×1175 by Reginald de Warenne, who had come to the barony of Wormegay by marriage to his wife Alice.²²⁹ His probable construction of the castle there suggests that the foundation of a priory was probably a classic (albeit late) example of the twinning of these features as part of a wider redevelopment of the landscape. Wormegay has already been encountered in association with its 'productive' Middle Anglo-Saxon site, which some have suggested represents the remains of a *monasterium*.²³⁰ It is possible that some form of religious community had survived in the vill, most probably as a small collection of priests, to be refounded as a fully constituted priory. Unfortunately, Domesday Book is of little help; while it attests to the presence of a church, this detail is interlined and no value for the church is given.²³¹ Even assuming the Middle Anglo-Saxon material does indeed represent the former presence of a religious community, the survival of any such community into the eleventh century is unknowable. The contextual evidence, that Wormegay was to become an honour following the Conquest and probably constituted the *caput* of its pre-Conquest owner Thorketil,²³² would,

²²⁵ As witnessed by the will of Theodred, bishop of London 942×951: Whitelock (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, no. 1.

²²⁶ Five entries, for Robert Malet, Roger of Poitou, Bury St Edmund's Abbey and the bishop of Thetford (twice) suggest two, possibly three churches, one of which appears to have had at least fifty-five acres of land attached: *LDB*, fols 392b, 349a, 368b, 379b and 195b respectively.

²²⁷ The foundation charter, taken from the Castle Acre Priory cartulary, BL Harley MS 2110 fol. 62v, is printed in Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, v, p. 58. The end-date for the foundation is William de Huntingfield's death in 1155.

²²⁸ Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, v, p. 58.

²²⁹ Vincent, 'Foundation of Wormegay Priory', p. 307.

²³⁰ See for instance Andrews, 'Middle Saxon Norfolk', pp. 20–1.

²³¹ *LDB*, fol. 206a.

²³² Liddiard, 'Landscapes of Lordship', pp. 31–3.

however, make this entirely credible. The siting of the priory on the island – actually a very narrow spur extending into marshland – accords with the pattern seen at Mendham of an extant community being removed from their original church to the island (Fig. 13). Once again, the intervisibility of ‘island’ and upland surrounding the marsh ensured that the removal of the monastery from the secular world was neither in sight nor mind, but a carefully structured relocation. Indeed, the siting of the priory must have been most successfully appreciated from the top of the motte upon which Warenne had his castle. Such a relationship would have been mutually beneficial: not only could the canons enjoy an idealised world of seclusion; the secular founders could enjoy the visible relationship of cloister and castle whilst emphasising the spirituality of their community.

If the situation at Hickling, Mendham and Wormegay is representative, the conclusion must be that such island sites represent a pattern whereby existing priestly communities were refounded and relocated. The date of these moves seems complimentary to this idea. Omitting the ‘land grant’ alien houses, the sample of fifty-eight monasteries within the diocese can be characterised as having a variety of location types. In the earliest period, from the Conquest to c.1100, the close siting of monasteries with castles, in not especially marginal locations, is clear (Table 3). The appearance of island locations appears to occur by 1135 with the creation of Pentney Priory, although the Cluniac priory of Bromholm (1113) should probably also be so interpreted. Definite island sites following Pentney occur then at Slevesholm (1135×1148), Mendham (by 1155), Wormegay (1166×1175), Crabhouse (c.1181), Leiston (1182) and Hickling (1185). The use of these sites by the Augustinians and Cluniacs counters the normal perception of their easier relations with everyday society. It also suggests that this form of removal from society relates as much to the influences on monastic thinking at the time, perhaps inspired by reformist enterprises such as the Cistercians, as to the actual type of order occupying these new sites.

Isolated sites

If the notion of a ‘removed’ monastery sees an old-established religious community recast into a regularised monastery, and relocated as part of wider moves in the creation of designed or ordered landscapes, a number of foundations appear to have no spiritual antecessors. Their appearance in ‘isolated’ locations could therefore be seen as conforming to the traditional model of an eremitical removal from society. A number of monasteries appear to have been located on sites that were, in the Cistercian ideal, ‘far from the concourse of men’.²³³ They are certainly not as numerous as has sometimes been claimed, but the way such sites were chosen is of interest. By definition, to be placed in isolated sites, the monastery would be built on virgin territory, even if its demesne land was not always previously unexploited. The difficulty in proving the existence of such sites, or of a policy behind such locational strategies, is that what may appear isolated or

²³³ Robinson (ed.), *Cistercian Abbeys of Britain*, p. 11.

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Table 3. Attributes of the monastic foundations in the diocese of Norwich 1066–c.1200, shown in approximate order of foundation

				Anglo-Saxon past	Anglo-Saxon <i>monasterium</i>	Castle nearby/adjacent	Moved site	Community converted	Shared parish church	Adjacent/close to parish church	Shrine/relics	Island site	Monastery 'removed'
1	1066×1077	Welle	Al Ben										
2	by 1082	Creting St Olave	Al Ben										
3	1086×1087	Eye	Al Ben	•	•	•		○					
4	1086×1087	Dunwich	Al Ben										
5	1087×1089	Castle Acre	Clun	•		•	•						
6	1090	Stoke by Clare	Al Ben		•	•	•	○					
7	c.1091	Blakenham	Al Ben										
8	1093	Binham	Ben		○			○	•				
9	1087×1100	Horstead	Al Ben										
10	1087×1100	Lessingham	Al Ben										
11	1087×1100	Toft Monks	Al Ben										
12	1087×1100	Walton	Al Ben	•	○	•	•	○		•			
13	1096	Norwich Cathedral Priory	Ben	•	•	•	•				•		
14	c.1100	Lynn	Ben *	○	○				•				
15	1101	St Leonard's Priory	Ben *	•	•					•			
16	1100×1102	Witchingham	Al Clun										
17	1103×1104	Thetford St Mary's	Clun	•	•	•	•	○					
18	c.1105	Horsham St Faith	Ben			•	•			•			
19	1107	Wymondham	Ben	•	○	•		○	•				
20	1101×1119	Yarmouth	Ben *		○				•				
21	1107×1116	Aldeby	Ben *						•				
22	1113	Bromholm	Clun							○	•	○	
23	1102×1126	West Acre	Aug	•	○			○		•			
24	1114×1115	Edwardstone	Ben										
25	1114×1116	Sudbury	Ben				○						
26	1114×1119	Bricett	Al Aug						•				
27	1100×1135	Creting St Mary	Al Ben										
28	1100×1135	Hempton	Aug					•					
29	c.1120	Blythburgh	Aug	•	•			•		•	•		
30	1120	Redlingfield	Ben nun						•				
31	by 1123	Sporle	Al Ben						•				
32	1130	Hoxne	Ben *	•	•		○	○					
33	by 1133	Ipswich Holy Trinity	Aug										
34	by 1135	Pentney	Aug	○								•	○
35	1136×1137	Carrow	Ben nun				•						
36	1138	Field Dalling	Al Sav										
37	1135×1144	Coxford	Aug	•	○		•	○					○
38	1135×1148	Slevesholm	Clun									•	
39	1139×1148	Thetford Holy Sepulchre	Holy Sep										
40	c.1146	Buckenham	Aug	○		•							
41	c.1150	Blackborough	Ben nun					•					
42	c.1150	Sibton	Cist										
43	c.1153	Walsingham	Aug	○	•			•		•	•		
44	by 1154	Wereham	Al Ben										
45	by 1155	Mendham	Clun	•	•			○				•	•
46	c.1155	Snape	Ben	○									
47	1146×1166	Woodbridge	Aug		○				•				
48	c.1160	Normansburgh	Aug>Clun					•					
49	by 1160	Wangford	Clun	○	•			○	•				
50	by 1163	Isleham	Al Ben							•			
51	1160×1175	Wormegay	Aug	•	○	•		○				•	
52	1170	Ixworth	Aug		○		○			•			

Landscapes of Monastic Foundation

				Anglo-Saxon past	Anglo-Saxon <i>monasterium</i>	Castle nearby/adjacent	Moved site	Community converted	Shared parish church	Adjacent/close to parish church	Shrine/relics	Island site	Monastery 'removed'
53	1171	Butley	Aug	●	○			○					○
54	1154×1189	Battisford	Hosp										
55	1163×1180	Thetford St George	Ben nun	●			●	○					
56	1173×1175	Carbrooke	Hosp							●			
57	c.1181	Crabhouse	Aug nun									●	
58	1182	Leiston	Prem				●					●	
59	c.1183	Bungay	Ben nun			●			●				
60	1184	Chippenham	Hosp										
61	1180×1189	Ipswich SS Peter and Paul	Aug	●	●			○		●			
62	1185	Hickling	Aug									●	●
63	1188	West Dereham	Prem	○	○								
64	c.1188	Dodnash	Aug				●						
65	c.1194	Letheringham	Aug						●				
66	1189×1199	Mountjoy	Aug										
67	c.1195	Campsey Ash	Aug nun										
68	1195	Langley	Prem										
69	1193×1199	Shouldham	Gilb							●			
70	c.1200	Alnesbourne	Aug										
71	by 1200	Peterstone	Aug	●	○			○					○

Notes

- Attribute certain
- Attribute uncertain/possible
- * Cell of Norwich Cathedral Priory
- > Foundation changed from one order to another
- 'Land grant' alien priories

Abbreviations

Al Aug	Alien Augustinian
Al Ben	Alien Benedictine
Al Clun	Alien Cluniac
Al Sav	Alien Savigniac
Aug	Augustinian
Ben	Benedictine
Cist	Cistercian
Clun	Cluniac
Gilb	Gilbertine
Holy Sep	Order of the Holy Sepulchre
Hosp	Hospitallers
nun	nunnery
Prem	Premonstratensian

inhospitable today may not have been so in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The hypothesis can only truly be proven as a result of more detailed archaeological study on a site by site basis. Equally interesting is the way that such isolation may soon have become compromised as a result of the monastery's inevitable interaction with the secular world. This not only has implications for what the point was in seeking such isolation, but how a monastery might subsequently respond to its relationship with lay society and seek to control secular ingress within its precinct or indeed the wider landscape. An example illustrates some of these considerations.

Bromholm Priory

Bromholm Priory in north-east Norfolk occupies a 'holm' site, from which it takes its name. The priory is easily visible, being set in a near-flat coastal plain, which rises up from the low level of Broadland to the south, to form cliffs at the sea edge. Despite this generally level landscape, the holm itself inclines by several metres, and this graduation appears even more impressive to the south where there is a rapid drop into a small valley. Aerial photographs show a now-relict watercourse ran through this. The Cluniac priory here was founded in 1113 by William de Glanville,²³⁴ but it was the promotion of a relic of the True Cross that led to Bromholm's fame and subsequent wealth.²³⁵ The tale of how the relic came to arrive at Bromholm is described most extensively by Roger of Wendover in his *Flowers of History*, where he characterises the house as 'very poor and altogether destitute of buildings'.²³⁶ Although the subsequent veneration of the relic led to an increase in Bromholm's fame and wealth following the start of pilgrimage there c.1223, the material remains give no reason to believe Roger's account. The architecture of the nave and north transept show the initial church to have been of a good size and high accomplishment, in the Late Norman/Transitional style, suggesting a non-provincial background to the architect in charge of the work. The church must have acted as a powerful statement of the priory's presence and the founder's wealth well before the explosion of interest in the Holy Rood relic.²³⁷

What, then, was the nature of the site upon which Glanville's community was settled? As at Hickling, the aerial photographic and cartographic evidence was collated and transcribed, revealing a well-enclosed precinct, roughly heart-shaped to the north of a watercourse (Fig. 49). With the exception of a possible prehistoric ring-ditch to the west of the farm buildings, no features suggested anything other than post-Conquest occupation on the site. Again, an intensive fieldwalking programme was undertaken, using a 25-metre grid with four transects per box. All the precinct area under arable, and some areas outside, were walked, comprising some twenty-six acres.²³⁸

Once again, fieldwalking was able to demonstrate that the site chosen for the priory was virgin ground without any Roman or Anglo-Saxon precedent.²³⁹ Instead, the ceramic sequence began with Local Medieval Unglazed pottery of twelfth- to fourteenth-century date (Fig. 50). This has some significance, because

²³⁴ Above, pp. 180–1 and n. 97.

²³⁵ Wormald, 'Rood of Bromholm'.

²³⁶ Giles (ed. and transl.), *Roger of Wendover's Flowers of History*, ii, pp. 446–8 at p. 468.

²³⁷ For the architecture see Thomas, 'A study of the remains at Bromholm Priory', unpublished (lodged in the Norfolk SMR).

²³⁸ Again, I am grateful to the farmer and landowner, the late Mr Edward Deane, for his enthusiastic support. The fieldwalking was undertaken in November 1987 with the help of my cousin, Mr Robert Fergusson.

²³⁹ It might be objected that the farmyard area, actually built upon the claustral complex, may have been occupied before the priory. Although true, any occupation, unless extremely small or of very short duration, might be expected to have left at least some pottery in the adjacent fields. The lack of earlier metalwork recovered from the site backs up this assertion.

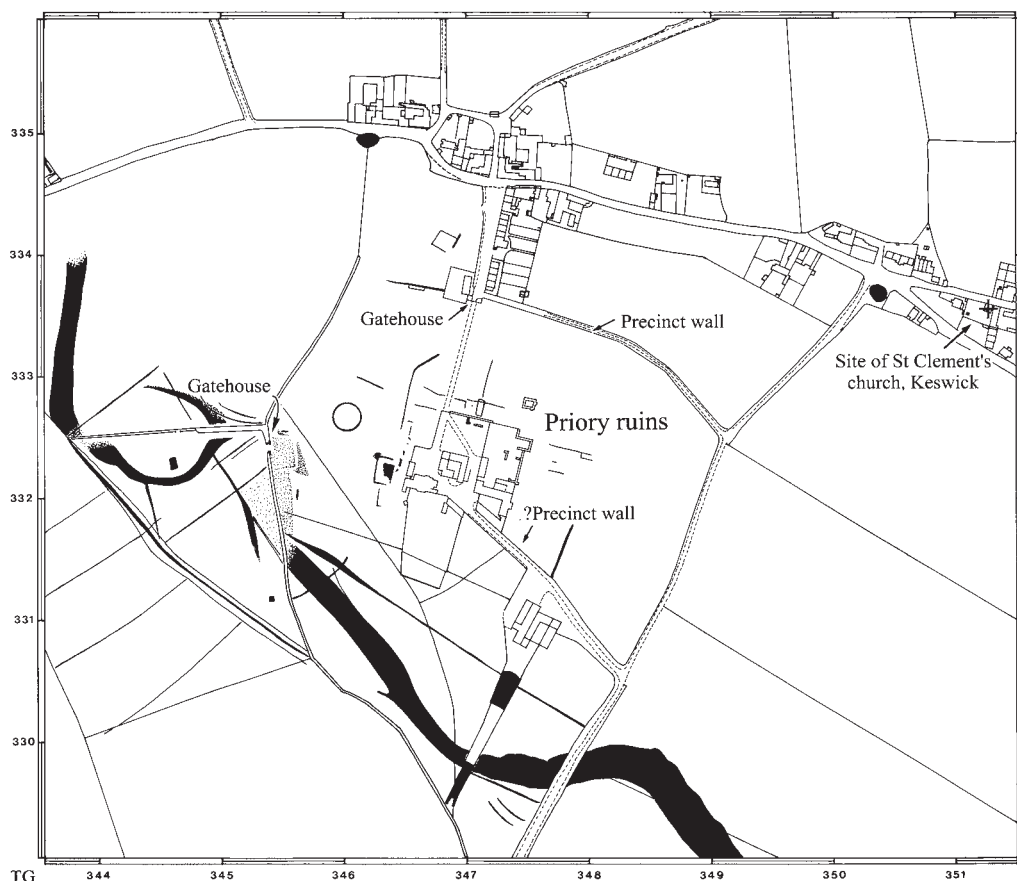


Fig. 49. Bromholm Priory, Norfolk. Precinct as reconstructed from aerial photographs and cartographic evidence.

the priory's foundation in 1113 occurred close to the period which saw Thetford-type wares being superseded by more locally based pottery in East Anglia, c.1100.²⁴⁰ The discarded pottery is therefore only likely to have been generated in the lifetime of the priory. The pottery spreads reflect this, being most extensive immediately to the east of the priory and continuing, in a sinuous line, around the north of the church, with a notable absence of pottery in the area originally occupied by the nave. A second concentration of pottery stands out very clearly around the western gatehouse, suggesting that it once formed living quarters for a gatekeeper. Finally, a concentration was identified to the northern end of the west field, beyond the line of priory precinct wall, which must relate to extramural occupation.

The picture that emerges is of an unoccupied site, specifically selected as such, with good access to an adjacent watercourse. The extent to which the site was truly isolated is less clear. Bromholm was sited in a parish with no obvious earlier

²⁴⁰ Jennings, *Eighteen Centuries of Pottery from Norwich*, pp. 22–3 and 41.

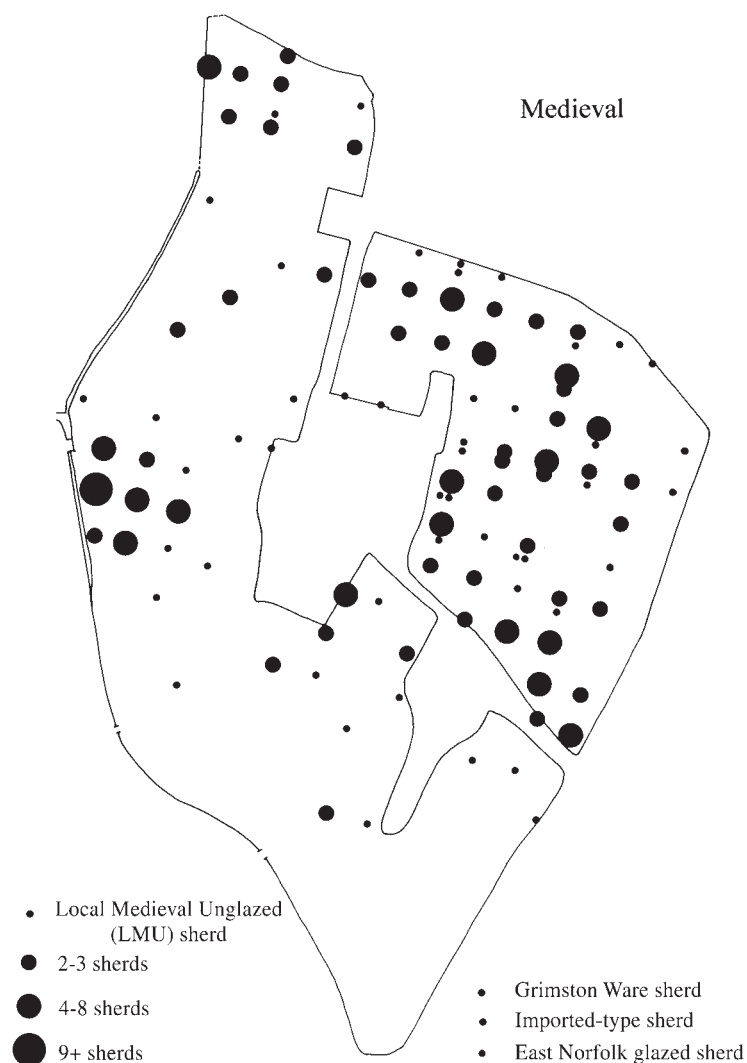


Fig. 50. The distribution of twelfth- to fourteenth-century Local Medieval Unglazed pottery located in fieldwalking at Bromholm Priory, Norfolk.

importance, whether as an Anglo-Saxon *monasterium*, an estate centre or a *caput*. The holm site was unoccupied, but the extent of settlement in the local area is less certain. Pottery immediately outside the precinct area of twelfth- to fourteenth-century date extends as far as the cropmark of the precinct wall, suggesting it is of post-priory date. Only thin scatters of Local Medieval Unglazed pottery have been found in the fields surrounding the priory, suggesting no immediate concentrations of settlement, despite the former presence of St Clement's church, Keswick, to the east.

Keswick church is unlikely to have been a subsequent development in the local landscape because Bartholomew de Glanville, son of the founder, confirmed the

land of Stanard the priest and his church of Keswick to the priory.²⁴¹ Ongoing coastal erosion may have been responsible for Bacton's Domesday valuations, most of which show a drop between 1066 and 1086.²⁴² Keswick seems most likely to have been a berewick of Bacton, as was Bromholm, which explains its lack of a Domesday entry. It also suggests limited occupation in the near vicinity of the priory, now all but irrecoverable. St Clement's church is now demolished, it and the surrounding land all being built over with modern housing. The lack of pottery in anything but thin scatters in the fields immediately adjacent may suggest any occupation was only light. Consequently, Bromholm can be seen as isolated, but only within limited terms. This effect can only have been heightened by the white cement rendering that would originally have been applied to the exterior of the walls²⁴³ and the regular chiming of the community's bells throughout the day and night as a call to prayer. The influence of such sights and sounds would have acted as powerful reminders of the Glanville family's place in society, and their religious piety.

In this light, the notion of an isolated monastic site in the densely occupied landscape of East Anglia is called into question. The choice of an 'isolated' or unoccupied location, as at Bromholm, finds direct similarities with those sites used by communities such as Mendham and Wormegay, which were 'removed' and refounded. While the use of such sites provides a very clear demonstration of the eremitical notion of the communal religious life, arguably it also marks the desire of founding families to have their religious servants be *seen* as holy and isolated. The location of the monastery, ever varied, must again have been a result of negotiation between community and patron in pursuit of their own interests. At Bromholm this subsequently involved the priory actively trying to attract lay people as pilgrims.

Understanding the strategies whereby religious communities controlled the flow of visitors to their precincts has most usually been approached by spatial analysis of architectural layouts.²⁴⁴ At Bromholm, the arable nature of the precinct has allowed a carefully controlled metal-detector survey. This has utilised the same site grid established for the fieldwalking survey, further broken down into 12.5×12.5-metre boxes, with the entire surface area being detected.²⁴⁵

²⁴¹ Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, v, p. 63. The charter is re-edited and given in full in Napier and Stevenson (eds), *Crawford Collection of Early Charters and Documents*, no. 16 and p. 152.

²⁴² *TRE* 14 villagers, *TRW* 10; then 4 slaves now 3; 5 men's ploughs now 1; then 180 sheep, now 50; then and later 10 ploughs, now 9½. *LDB*, fols 155b–156a. Marine incursions certainly affected the priory in the fourteenth century. In 1385, a licence of fifty marks was paid for the appropriation of Berdewell church to help support the convent, because their lands had 'been wasted by inundations of the sea . . . so that they can scarcely support the burdens of their foundation': *CPR* 1381–5, p. 173. Continued erosion and marine encroachments were such that a reassessment of manorial landholdings were made in a land survey of 1545–6: PRO: SC 12/12/22.

²⁴³ An expanding body of evidence shows that this was frequently the case, for instance white mortar render was used on the exterior of Thomas of Bayeux's York Minster, completed c.1100: Phillips, *Excavations at York Minster II*, pp. 99–101. More famously, Radulfus Glaber in his *Five Books of the Histories* written c.1030–46 commented that 'it was as if the whole world were . . . cladding itself everywhere in a white mantle of churches': France *et al.* (eds), *Rodulphus Glaber Opera*, pp. 114–16.

²⁴⁴ See for instance Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines of Medieval England* and Dixon, 'Gateways to heaven', esp. at pp. 71–2.

²⁴⁵ The work has been undertaken with great skill and probity by members of the East Norfolk Detectors,

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The results have been dramatic, recovering in excess of 6,000 metal targets in three seasons, from an area of seventeen acres. The vast majority of finds are scraps of lead waste, but over 400 objects have been allocated individual find numbers. None pre-date the foundation of the priory, reinforcing the results of the fieldwalking.²⁴⁶

More importantly, despite the deep-ploughing of the site over many years, the movement of artefacts appears to have been limited. Consequently, distinct categories of find have been found in concentrations, demonstrating different activities within parts of the monastic precinct. For instance, four medieval horse-harness pendants have been recovered, all in the large field to the west of the claustral complex, from which little pottery was recovered during fieldwalking. By contrast, dress-fittings such as strap-ends and belt buckles have been found in some profusion in the field to the north and east of the priory church. Not only does this seem to indicate where visitors were directed; it is where financial transactions were undertaken. Seventy-five hammered silver and bronze coins, ranging from a short-cross penny of Stephen (1135–54) to a Charles I farthing token of c.1630–44, have been recovered, in two clusters next to the priory buildings.²⁴⁷ One grouping in particular coincides with a concentration of cast lead weights. If these artefact types indicate the former presence of market stalls, as seems likely, their location within the precinct evidently changed during the life of the priory. Dating of the coins has shown their areas of loss changed over time. While beginning to the east of the priory, by the fifteenth century commercial activity appears to have been focussed just inside the precinct, next to the principal, northern, gatehouse. The pilgrim trade is, perhaps surprisingly, poorly indicated. Despite their discovery in London and elsewhere, no pilgrim badges or ampullae relating to the shrine at Bromholm have been found.²⁴⁸ However, a cast rectangular lead sheet portraying a woman with a swaying posture, probably of early fourteenth-century date, perhaps represents an *ex voto*.²⁴⁹ Three lead discs have also been found, bearing on one side the head of Christ wearing the crown of thorns, and on the other the distinctive cross of Bromholm with its double bar. The discs, of exactly the same design but not mould-identical, are probably some form of token issued at the priory (Plate 10).

co-ordinated by myself and Mr Phil Emery. A brief interim report on the project is Pestell, 'New surveys at Bromholm Priory'. Thanks to the generosity of the detectorists and landowner, all finds have been donated to Norwich Castle Museum, where they will form a resource for future study.

²⁴⁶ With one exception, SF 294, an Iron Age Snettisham-type copper-alloy stater forgery of c.65BC. The smallfind figure is accurate as of July 2003, but the work is ongoing and the number will almost certainly rise.

²⁴⁷ We are very grateful to Dr Martin Allen, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, for the identification of these coins.

²⁴⁸ Although they certainly existed: Bromholm ampullae are illustrated in Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges*, pp. 161–5 and Mitchiner, *Medieval Pilgrim and Secular Badges*, p. 175.

²⁴⁹ Illustrated in Pestell, 'New surveys at Bromholm Priory', fig. on p. 53.



Plate 10. Possible tokens of cast lead-alloy depicting the head of Christ on one side, and the Rood of Bromholm on the other. Found during metal detection at Bromholm Priory, Norfolk.

MONASTIC SITE LOCATION IN THE EAST ANGLIAN LANDSCAPE

The example of Bromholm forces us to consider the implications of site selection and the extent to which many monasteries were, or could ever hope to be, truly isolated. Although on a previously uninhabited ‘holm’ site, set in a thinly occupied subsidiary settlement of Bacton, Bromholm Priory must have been highly visible to the contemporary population, set in its muted coastal landscape.

As we have seen, a range of factors lay behind the promotion and patronage of monastic life, and its implementation in post-Conquest East Anglia. All stemmed from religious devotion but equally strong were other forces such as the desire to establish elite landscapes, demonstrating both social control and status, and the political importance of monastic practice. Underpinning them all was the multi-faceted symbolic importance of the monastery. Quite clearly, the sheer number of monasteries in East Anglia makes it impossible in a study of this size to present anything other than a partial view of the foundations made in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Despite the range of monastic orders represented, and the number of families involved in making foundations within a wide and varied geographical landscape, a number of common influences can be determined. Perhaps the most significant of these is the importance of the Anglo-Saxon past. Many monasteries appear to have had their roots in Anglo-Saxon priestly communities that were refounded. And, where no such evidence can be detected, subsequent monastic sites can often be shown to have had some attraction in

secular terms. The choice of site for a new community was therefore often already being structured for the monastic founder. Other restrictions such as patterns of land tenure can only have exacerbated this. It is impossible to provide an exact figure for these conditions as the range of evidence upon which to judge the former existence of such communities is so variable and often equivocal. Some basis for discussion is made in Table 3, where the probable or possible indications of a former community are tabulated. It suggests that at least twelve definite or probable communities preceded a post-Conquest monastery, while another twelve sites seem possible. None were on the subsequent 'land-grant' alien priory sites. This means of the 58 'regular' monasteries in the East Anglian sample studied here, 41.4% have some evidence to suggest that they were preceded by a priestly community, while 20.7% have reasonable proof for such a link. 19 monasteries, again none of them 'land-grant' alien priories, were sited in parishes having some evidence for holding significance in the Anglo-Saxon past, for instance as an estate centre. In some cases, the extent to which any importance might have lived on is questionable. For instance, Snape in Suffolk, home to a Benedictine priory founded in 1155, is also famous for its royal ship burial of late sixth-century date.²⁵⁰ While this place may have had an importance for members of the East Anglian royal family for some time in the Anglo-Saxon period, this is certainly not visible by Domesday.

There were of course other, cumulative, factors. As more monasteries were founded, so space for succeeding ones became progressively harder to find, leading to the concentration of houses in the more favourable conditions prevailing in west Norfolk and east Suffolk. Restrictions of space may also have led to more monasteries being founded on virgin sites with no antiquity or history of sanctity. This in turn may have helped to stimulate the monks' own views of themselves, reflected in their literature, about desiring places of solitude. The breakdown of the minster church system, and the increasingly lower social level at which monastic foundations were made, perhaps also gradually reduced the likelihood of old or important sites being reused.

Ultimately, the variety of factors involved in the foundation of a monastic community – choice of a site, construction of its buildings and the creation of an endowment – came through a dialogue between the founder, his or her family, and the community supplying staff for the proposed new house. There would doubtless have been differences of opinion and viewpoint, and of influences and motivations behind such actions, but arguably within these, the patron was pre-eminent; their will was, after all, crucial to the successful birth of any community. Their needs, as well as those of the community involved, must have been central to the general location of a monastery, even if less obviously behind its specific siting. But, as we have seen from a range of examples, it would occasion no surprise if their influence was to be felt strongly in this area too, and more so than monastic historians have previously considered.

²⁵⁰ For the priory see Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses*, pp. 76–7 and VCH Suffolk, ii, pp. 79–80. For the ship-burial see Filmer-Sankey and Pestell, *Snape Anglo-Saxon Cemetery*.

Conclusions

AT THE start of this book, it was argued that monastic studies have been heavily influenced by outdated or antiquarian inquiry, better described as research interests than research agenda. While the rise of the New Archaeology in the 1960s did much to promote the integration of scientific approaches with archaeological field methods, monastic studies have been less innovative, typically focussing upon the archaeological investigation of building ground-plans and architectural form. Monastic studies have also tended to be distorted by a preferential level of interest being shown in the Cistercians, in comparison to other religious orders. While the white monks were undoubtedly a powerful force in medieval religious life, they need not have been representative of 'monasticism' in general and what it meant to various contemporary audiences. This is particularly true in East Anglia, which had only one Cistercian foundation until the mid-thirteenth century.¹ Perhaps most significantly, monastic research has tended to be divided into 'pre-' or 'post-' Norman Conquest periods of study, a phenomenon that appears to relate to the continued primacy of a taxonomic approach, identifying and comparing the remains of medieval buildings or researching particular monastic orders. This situation has only been exacerbated by the decline in research excavations and the rise of rescue-driven archaeological work in recent years. Often, overlying research strategies have not been formulated, investigation tending to occur where damage is threatened, rather than where information is needed.²

Against this backdrop of practical difficulties, the area of research that has advanced most in recent years concerns the investigation of wider monastic precincts and estates. This has stressed the industrial activity undertaken at many religious sites and has shed light on the wider economic place held by these institutions (generally male monasteries), as self-sufficient corporations in medieval society.³ There has, however, been relatively little investigation of the ways in which monasteries may have come to be used or imbued with proactive levels of

¹ When Sibton Abbey was joined by a Cistercian nunnery at Marham in Norfolk, founded in 1249 by Isabel, widow of Hugh d'Albini: *VCH Norfolk*, ii, pp. 369–70. Uniquely for a female Cistercian house, Marham was founded as an abbey and received into the society of the Order from an early date order: Thompson, *Women Religious*, pp. 96–9.

² An added complication has been the mushrooming of archaeological companies undertaking work on different areas that were originally part of the same site. A recent example is the Norwich Greyfriars, now divided by the modern Prince of Wales Road, leading to different developers choosing different commercial archaeological contractors. The site is to be published in two separate excavation reports in which there is minimal integration or sharing of data: see Emery, *Norwich Greyfriars*, forthcoming.

³ Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, p. 188.

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meaning to wider society: For Glyn Coppack, 'in our attempts to understand their functions . . . archaeology can provide the how but it cannot provide the why'.⁴ In fact, post-processual schools of archaeological thought have done much to negate such views and offer up new readings of material culture. Understanding aspects of meaning have been argued in this book to be most powerful when applied through wider, landscape-based, studies, in particular when examining the foundation of monasteries; it was at this initial moment that their *raison d'être*, in religious life and its impact on the secular world, might be most clearly read. It was also the moment when the founding individual or family had the greatest personal input into the shape or form of the nascent community. Fundamental to this is integrating knowledge of the Anglo-Saxon past to medieval landscapes.

This book has attempted such study by examining the experience of East Anglia, to provide a context of sufficiently detailed focus to understand the particular motives or actions behind monastic foundation. This regionalism should not be mistaken for parochialism. Many of the issues discussed reflect wider moves or ideas enmeshed within society at a national level, and await application to other localities. Having looked at these various issues and their interaction in East Anglia, it is time to summarise some of the forces operating behind monastic foundation. Three interlocking features present themselves: the Anglo-Saxon inheritance; the role of the surrounding landscape; and the motives of founding patrons.

THE ROLE OF THE PAST

An unfortunate aspect of antiquarian interest in monasticism was the lack of detailed archaeological investigation into Anglo-Saxon religious life until the mid-twentieth century.⁵ The more important historical sources were well-known and widely disseminated, most crucially Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (itself providing a highly polemical perspective on the earliest monasteries), but there was little detailed understanding of pre-Conquest ecclesiastical structures. Archaeologically, little was understood of the location, form or dating of Anglo-Saxon *monasteria*. Indeed, as has been seen, even today many problems remain about the identification of these sites, despite major advances in our knowledge. What is becoming better appreciated is the underlying importance of the earliest estate centres for understanding subsequent networks of secular and religious life.

In East Anglia, this is seen very clearly in the coincidence of post-Conquest monastic foundations with sites known to have had an importance in the Anglo-Saxon period. At its most obvious in the earliest period of Norman settlement, this correspondence suggests an appropriation of the Anglo-Saxon past

⁴ Coppack, *Abbeys and Priories*, p. 30.

⁵ While architectural historians like Thomas Rickman and Baldwin Brown were interested in identifying Anglo-Saxon churches, the first excavation of crucial importance for looking at an Anglo-Saxon monastery was undoubtedly that at Whitby Abbey in the 1940s: Peers and Radford, 'Saxon monastery at Whitby'.

most easily seen when relating to the late tenth or eleventh century, but on occasion it was perhaps structured by the deeper past.⁶ With the importance of religion to Norman governance, the appreciation of this past was manifested in a variety of ways. Perhaps the clearest demonstration was in Bishop Herbert de Losinga's actions following the transfer of his see to Norwich, and in particular the way in which St Michael's minster was reduced to a chapel, subsequently served by St Leonard's Priory.⁷

Interestingly, such usurpations have been noted in another context. In discussing the widespread rebuilding of cathedrals in the century following Hastings, Eric Fernie has pointed out that these new structures were consistently complete rebuildings. Of those sites that were not removed and where cathedrals already existed, not one preserves any traces of the original Anglo-Saxon fabric *in situ*. Instead, there was a policy of total rebuilding, often with even the alignment of the new buildings being altered, indicating a clean break with the past.⁸ This suggests, if not a new attitude to cathedral buildings, at least a desire to expunge those structures of the Anglo-Saxon past while reshaping the institution. Such sweeping changes are less easy to detect in the monastic houses of East Anglia, but a number of priestly communities, like Mendham, Blythburgh and Walsingham, appear to have been regularised by a Norman aristocracy. A more radical or ideological approach to this appears in those several cases where the new monastic site itself was 'removed'.⁹

However, the evidence for complete rebuildings seen in the architecture of cathedrals is impossible to apply to East Anglia's monasteries: only a few have undergone excavation, and that usually very limited in scale and concentrating on recovering medieval church and claustral ground-plans. The earliest phases of sites have generally remained unlocated. Very few of the monasteries have especially extensive surviving fabric, and where they do, there is little evidence for the maintenance of an Anglo-Saxon church within a later building.¹⁰ The likelihood

⁶ As, perhaps, with the appearance of the Augustinian communities at Butley and Wormegay with their rich evidence of Middle Anglo-Saxon settlement, but little to suggest an importance by the tenth or eleventh century: Pestell, 'The afterlife', and Chapter 5, pp. 198 and 207–8.

⁷ Chapter 5, p. 185 and Pestell, 'Monastic foundation strategies', p. 206–11.

⁸ At York Minster, despite extensive excavations undertaken between 1967 and 1973, no evidence was found for an Anglo-Saxon precursor to Thomas of Bayeux's cathedral. The old church may instead have lain adjacent and perhaps to the north of the minster: Phillips, *Excavations at York Minster II*, p. 1. At Winchester, the Old and New Minsters were both replaced by the cathedral begun by Bishop Walkelin in 1079, which was laid out on a new orientation: Biddle, 'Excavations at Winchester 1970', pp. 115–17 and fig. 6. The impressive Carolingian-style church of ninth- to tenth-century date at Cirencester also appears to have been totally replaced in the twelfth century following the community's refoundation into an Augustinian priory c.1117: Wilkinson and McWhirr, *Cirencester Anglo-Saxon Church and Medieval Abbey*, pp. 32–9 and 43–50.

⁹ Chapter 5, pp. 201–8.

¹⁰ At this point, we step into the treacherous seas of dating Saxo-Norman architecture. Weybourne Priory, founded 1199×1216 (and therefore not considered in this study), has an axial Saxo-Norman tower preserved within the priory ruins which adjoin the parish church. The tower displays sufficient features to be considered of 'C3' date by the Taylors, i.e. 1050–1100: Taylor and Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, ii, pp. 646–7. The original church's axial design is similar to other buildings which would appear to have once stood at Late Anglo-Saxon minster sites, for instance Eyke in Suffolk: Warner, *The Origins of Suffolk*, p. 117. A similar axial-towered church at Great Dunham, Norfolk, was a mother church of some form: a charter of Castle Acre Priory records it as having a chapel of St Mary attached, in the time of

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is that, as with the cathedrals, many Norman monasteries totally rebuilt all the buildings of a community, incorporating a standardised claustral groundplan arrangement. Thereafter, subsequent modifications were to be seen in the building fabric but in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries at least, total rebuilding, not patching, was the preferred option.¹¹

Given that a choice does appear to have been exercised over how existing priestly communities were regularised, it is interesting to question the locational stability of sites with an Anglo-Saxon past. The principal difficulty remains identifying the earliest, Middle Anglo-Saxon, 'monasteries' and key religious sites. In East Anglia, we are almost totally reliant upon archaeological evidence, and although a few sites have reasonable documentary sources, the majority do not. Blythburgh, for instance, was recorded as a royal vill and, according to *Liber Eliensis*, was in possession of the bodies of members of the East Anglia royal family for burial. It survived with a church of some importance into the post-Conquest period. Domesday Book recorded the vill as a royal estate, that the church had two carucates of land (240 acres) attached and other churches belonging to it, without land.¹² The minster status of this church was almost certainly the reason the village subsequently came to have an early Augustinian foundation, made by c.1120.¹³ Other sites of known or implied importance in the Middle Anglo-Saxon period did not fare so well. Iken, most probably to be identified with *Icanho*, at which St Botolph founded a *monasterium* in AD 654, did not come to retain any importance. At Domesday it had no independent entry, indicating its inclusion with estates elsewhere, probably in the vill of Sudbourne, which was recorded as having two churches.¹⁴ The spectacular topographical

Bishop Everard of Norwich (1121–45): *ecclesiam de Dunham cum capella sancte Marie que ad eandem ecclesiam pertinet*. The charter dates to 11 May 1138 × 1145 and is printed in Harper-Bill (ed.), *English Episcopal Acta VI: Norwich 1070–1214*, no. 29; for the church, see Taylor and Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, i, pp. 217–21. No church is recorded for Weybourne in Domesday Book but it is possible that the building represents a Norman construction replacing an Anglo-Saxon predecessor. Certainly, the 'Anglo-Saxon' features of these churches and the similar round towered churches common in East Anglia have not prevented some from arguing that most, if not all, are post-Conquest in date. See for instance Heywood, 'Round towers of East Anglia'. If this is the case, those buildings surviving, patched into later architecture, may again represent early Norman total rebuildings, sweeping away Anglo-Saxon structures.

¹¹ It is of some interest that Lewes Priory, Sussex, apparently had its origins in a Late Anglo-Saxon building, possibly a church. However, this was not on the site of the priory church but was found in excavation beneath the later infirmary chapel: Lyne, *Lewes Priory: Excavations by Richard Lewis 1969–82*, pp. 16–18. At St Oswald's Priory in Gloucester, at least one wall of the original ninth-century minster church became incorporated into the subsequent medieval priory, actually structuring the latter's layout: Heighway and Bryant, *Golden Minster*, pp. 54–96. In East Anglia it has been noted by Richard Gem of Holm St Benet's 'medieval ruins that "although none of the masonry appears to be of pre-Conquest date, it is doubtless significant that the church retained a long, unaisled nave throughout its existence, by implication perpetuating an Anglo-Saxon Romanesque style": Gem, 'Origins of the Early Romanesque architecture of England', p. 140 n. 46 and p. 786. The ruins visible today are indeed medieval and include flushwork. An illustration of the medieval abbey church, copied from a drawing in Cotton Nero D.ii (the Holm St Benet's MS containing the Chronicle of John of Oxeneyes), is reproduced in Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, iii, p. 81.

¹² *LDB*, fol. 282a.

¹³ For the date and circumstances of Blythburgh's establishment see Harper-Bill (ed.), *Blythburgh Priory Cartulary*, i, pp. 1–3.

¹⁴ *LDB*, fols 316b and 384a.

location of Iken church was exploited in the Anglo-Saxon period, but later ignored. Instead, monasteries came to be founded nearby, at Snape, Leiston and Butley. Blythburgh and Iken are only two examples, but they represent opposite ends of the spectrum in which religious communities followed different trajectories. The community might either continue in existence in the decades following the Norman Conquest, or fail even within the Anglo-Saxon period.

Not only was it uncertain whether some communities might survive; the documentary and archaeological evidence does little to help us understand why some communities fared better than others. The First Viking Age has probably been used for too long as a convenient excuse for the demise of certain institutions. Indeed, it probably disguises our own shortcomings in comprehending the dynamics behind the rise or fall of religious communities. Despite this, it is remarkable how knowledge of the use of a site often appears to have been preserved even when its former status had been lost. This sanctity of location is an idea that lasted into the later medieval period. For instance, when Leiston Abbey relocated to its second site in 1362, the original abbey was demolished and architectural elements, by now of antiquated design, were reassembled in the new monastic church.¹⁵ Not only was there a desire for continuity in the new building; the old abandoned site was marked by a chapel constructed on the site of the demolished church.

There was, in general, what we might call a 'continuity of retrospection'. The first *monasteria* drew on the past and on concepts of *romanitas*, often being placed in or near Roman structures such as forts. Subsequently, some old Anglo-Saxon *monasteria* came to be regularised in the tenth-century monastic reform. At other sites, the absence of such earlier traditions arguably led to their fraudulent creation as appears to have happened at Holm St Benet's and Thorney Abbeys.¹⁶ Finally, Norman monasteries often appear to have specifically chosen Anglo-Saxon communities for regularisation, while completely replacing any vestiges of their predecessors' churches. Together, these aspects say something about a view or views of the past. The spirituality of a site was important, as was its preservation as sacred ground. By contrast, the *manner* in which religious life was manifested was capable of presentation in very different ways. As with their tenth-century predecessors, in making changes after the Conquest the new monastic founders were undoubtedly appropriating an established tradition of sanctity and spirituality. They were, though, implicitly criticising contemporary Anglo-Saxon priestly communities, leading to their modification. Their motives may have been various: the desire, through regularisation, to support religious communities in a way more fitting to the Norman view of monasticism; the demonstration of this patronage in the place of an older, Anglo-Saxon, social order; or the simple desire to sponsor religious life in which new buildings (for example) were erected. Regardless which of these (or other) messages were intended, the importance of the inherited Anglo-Saxon social landscape is manifest, whether taking over sites, or deliberately avoiding them to create new ones.

¹⁵ Pevsner, *Buildings of England: Suffolk*, p. 304.

¹⁶ Chapter 4, pp. 145–6 and 136–7.

TOPOGRAPHY AND LANDSCAPE

Just as the past was important in the foundation of many Later Anglo-Saxon and medieval monasteries, so too were the types of location chosen. One of the characteristic features of post-Conquest monasteries was the similar way in which foundations were made at a baronial level. At Castle Acre, Eye, Norwich, Stoke-by-Clare, Thetford and Walton, a familiar combination of attributes repeated themselves, including an Anglo-Saxon 'past' to most, whether as a royal vill and/or a *monasterium*. All had castles founded nearby in a twin arrangement, and at Eye, Castle Acre, Stoke and Walton, the community was originally located within the castle ward before being moved to a new site outside.¹⁷ The difference between these establishments and the alien priories, mostly founded at the same time, is striking.

It was only in the reign of Henry I (1100–35) that the importance or relevance of an Anglo-Saxon past began to wane: foundations such as Bromholm Priory, as we have seen, were founded on virgin ground and in areas with no clear pre-Conquest importance. While this may reflect a more settled view of religious patronage with less need for the imposition of a new monastic ideology at ancient Anglo-Saxon religious centres, it does not mean that Insular precursors no longer mattered. Many monasteries continued to replace extant communities, as at Mendham, Thetford St George's, Walsingham and possibly Butley and Coxford. However, there appears to have been greater freedom and variety in locational choices. Increasingly, different uses were made of the landscape context of monasteries and their attendant symbolic and political overtones.

A recurring theme of this book has been the significance of the place in the landscape occupied by a monastic site. An important element frequently attributed to the topographical placement of monasteries from the Conversion to the Dissolution has been their supposed isolation, or setting apart from secular society. This has been suggested with some frequency for Middle Anglo-Saxon sites, *monasteria* often being identified as occupying marshy islands, hilltops, promontories or Roman forts.¹⁸ Thus placed, they could be interpreted as different and 'other' than secular settlements positioned without such regard to

¹⁷ The same process of moving a church appears to have happened at Burgh Castle. Anglo-Saxon burials within the Roman shore fort suggest the former presence of a church that subsequently came to serve the castle erected in the south-west corner, probably in the eleventh century: Johnson, *Burgh Castle*, p. 4. The new parish church of SS Peter and Paul – a dedication quite acceptable for a church of antiquity at Burgh – has been claimed as Anglo-Saxon in date principally because of its circular west tower (see for instance Goode, *Round Tower Churches of South-East England*, pp. 168–9). However, the tower was added to the nave and the latter is clearly Norman. Detailed inspection reveals that in the angle between the south porch west wall and the nave south wall are the remains of the original twelfth-century Romanesque south door voussoirs, in bond with (rather than punched into) the nave walling. Sandy Heslop has kindly suggested to me (pers. comm.) that although the decoration is difficult to date precisely, it seems to combine chip-carving, which appears in Norfolk c.1080, and drilling, which can be found in the second half of the twelfth century at nearby Hales and Haddiscoe churches. Its simplicity perhaps suggests an earlier date, but this is unprovable. Regardless, the establishment of a new church outside the shore fort helps reaffirm a Norman date for the motte.

¹⁸ Blair, 'Anglo-Saxon minsters; a topographical review'.

locational strategy. In fact, our lack of understanding of secular estate centres, as opposed to lesser secondary or peripheral settlement, blurs the boundaries of such cases. Instead, it seems highly likely that fundamentally similar locations were exploited for both types of settlement and that in several cases both shared the same site. The problem is that understanding this situation rests squarely on the correct interpretation of Middle Anglo-Saxon sites like Brandon and Bawsey that otherwise have little or no documentary history.

Such interpretations might imply that had documentary evidence such as charters survived for Brandon or Bawsey, they could be categorised as purely ecclesiastical and that it is only the lack of such data that has encouraged archaeologists to suggest alternative explanations. This is certainly possible. Yet even where documentary evidence does exist, as in some other regions of England, it is not so complete as to act as a land register defining those areas that are 'secular' and those that are 'ecclesiastical'. Moreover, this argument fails to address the possibility of regional differences in ecclesiastical structure and the potential fluidity of secular and ecclesiastical estates. Some scholars have chosen to draw attention to the outright grants of land to the Church to emphasise their separate-ness, but this ignores the fact that *monasteria* were themselves a mixed collection of communal organisations.¹⁹ Some must have acted as independent corporations which indeed had topographical removal from society and financial and landholding independence in much the same way as later regularised Benedictine monasteries. But it is unlikely that all acted in this way, and the physically close siting of royal villas such as Blythburgh with their known *monasteria* points to an intimate relationship in places. Documentary evidence is also likely to be biased in favour of the Church: since land was automatically held of the king, royal villas did not need charters. The likelihood of charters, let alone cartularies, belonging to secular landowners surviving to indicate their ownership of land was far more remote.²⁰ This bias in the preservation of the documentary evidence has unsurprisingly privileged the role of the Church in questions of land ownership. After all, charters

nearly always served to confirm the rights of the institution they were meant for. Their side-effects, if not the essence of their existence, are therefore most likely to be system-confirming.²¹

Paradoxically, one might argue that only those communities most in danger of, or worried about, losing their land needed to take such vigorous care of their endowments by writing charters.

Emphasis on the role or importance of charters has perhaps also encouraged a more static view of the nature of land tenure, even though the evidence we have

¹⁹ Blair, 'Ecclesiastical organization', pp. 196 and 208–9.

²⁰ Examples of this occur in the Burton Abbey archive, where about half of this eleventh-century Staffordshire foundation's pre-Conquest charters concern estates with no known connexion to the abbey: Brooks, 'A new charter of King Edgar', pp. 220–1; Sawyer (ed.), *Charters of Burton Abbey*. The odds against such survivals were quite high, and it is instructive to note the late date of these particular charters.

²¹ Milis, *Angelic Monks and Earthly Men*, p. 5.

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shows that land disputes were endemic in the Early Medieval period.²² Although churches may frequently appear to have had locational stability, their status, or that of the controlling organisation, could decline or disappear. Not only might secular settlements have been given to or converted into ecclesiastical communities; *monasteria* could be secularised just as easily.²³ Moreover, the recent excavations at Flixborough suggest that this high-status settlement migrated over a large area of some twenty-three acres.²⁴ Within this, there may have been a distinction between areas of secular and religious settlement that relates more to differential exploitation of space over time than to separate ownership. Amid the dynamics of religious patronage, 'monastic' occupation may simply represent a passing aspect in the history of a site. This is certainly one possible explanation for the site at Flixborough.²⁵

Because topographical and locational aspects on their own are not enough to distinguish early Anglo-Saxon *monasteria* from secular estate-centres, it is only with the explicitly monastic foundations made as a result of the Benedictine tenth-century reform movement that topographical location strategies can be considered with more confidence. The liminal marshland setting of many East Anglian monasteries can indeed be interpreted as demonstrating the inmates' desire for removal from secular society. However, the implications of patronage under West Saxon kingship with its centralising royal government are as important given the location of the East Anglian monasteries at the edge of the historical Mercian kingdom. The selection of Crowland and Ely, and indeed the regularisation of Bury St Edmunds in the eleventh century, amounted to no less than a process of legitimisation: selecting *monasteria* for conversion simply allowed an appeal to the religious past by those engaged in the political present.

The locational significance of certain sites must always have influenced religious patronage by royal rulers. One of the most compelling reasons in support of East Anglia's first see, *Domnocc*, being located at Walton Castle near Felixstowe is the sheer sense that it makes in relation to the known contemporary political geography. When the East Anglian king Sigebert first accepted Christianity c.630, the powerbase of the ruling Wuffinga dynasty was based in south-east Suffolk. Royal ship burials at Snape and Sutton Hoo, a royal vill at Rendlesham and an *emporium* at Ipswich attest to a tightly focused area of royal activity.²⁶ Walton was not only well sited within this heart of the Wuffinga's powerbase,

²² As witnessed in the disputes with reformed Benedictine monasteries in the wake of King Edgar's death, with the interpretation of the land grants made in Bishop Theodred of London's will, or the ownership of churches or estates at Domesday.

²³ There are numerous instances of lay patrimonies being turned into ecclesiastical estates, one of the reasons Bede feared the establishment of 'false' monasteries. For the secularisation of sites see Fleming, 'Monastic lands and England's defence' and Dumville, 'Ecclesiastical lands and the defence of Wessex' in his *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar*, pp. 29–54.

²⁴ Loveluck, 'A high-status Anglo-Saxon settlement', p. 150 and fig. 4; 'Wealth, waste and conspicuous consumption', pp. 81–90.

²⁵ Loveluck, 'A high-status Anglo-Saxon settlement', pp. 158–60.

²⁶ For Snape's topographical setting see Filmer-Sankey and Pestell, *Snape Anglo-Saxon Cemetery*, pp. 1–3 and 264–6. For Sutton Hoo's context see Green, *Sutton Hoo*, pp. 127–47 and Care Evans, *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial*, pp. 107–8. For Rendlesham and Ipswich see Warner, *Origins of Suffolk*, pp. 115–18 and 165–71 and Wade, 'Urbanisation of East Anglia'.

with its Roman fort between the Orwell and Deben estuaries: it stood on the East Anglian side of a border (the River Orwell) that defined the very East Anglian kingdom from the rival East Saxons of Essex. This same river was used by shipping to reach the kingdom's trade entrepôt at Ipswich. Positioned here, the East Anglian see would have acted as a spiritual flagship, proclaiming the Christianity of the kingdom, while its topographical situation, within the fort, would have drawn attention to concepts of *romanitas*. This setting would have helped to proclaim the nature of the site, similar to many Continental and specifically Frankish religious foundations, which were familiar to the international traders descending upon Ipswich.²⁷ A rather similar series of associations would have been drawn from the monastic cells initiated by Bishop Herbert de Losinga at the maritime ports of Lynn and Yarmouth. In this case, the strategy utilised monastic foundations at the border of Norfolk.

At its core, the topographical setting of a monastic house could act just as strongly as an expression of that institution's identity, aims and aspirations as could the reality of how it led its life behind the precinct wall. Locational choice, whether in the early eighth or late twelfth century, was always specific, with certain preferences of siting being exercised for a variety of reasons. One of the most traditional readings given for monastic locations is the isolation desired by the cenobitic lifestyle and, indeed, a number of medieval accounts are explicit about the desire inmates had for isolation. Hugh Candidus provides perhaps the best-known declaration, in talking about God placing small islands in the Fens for His servants to occupy.²⁸

Hugh's account of the Fenland monasteries may be representative of the views of a majority of monks, but it was clearly not universal. The wider political issues that had played a major role in the creation of many abbeys in the tenth century also led to the protracted squabbles over land ownership with secular figures after the deaths of Bishop Æthelwold and King Edgar. Just like the monasteries' patrons, others saw the Fenland landscape as far from desolate and without value.

SECULAR AND RELIGIOUS – A TENSION BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

The interaction between the monastic house and secular society is the third major theme that this book has attempted to highlight. From the foundation of the earliest Anglo-Saxon *monasteria*, through Edgar's patronage of reformed Benedictine monasteries, to the variety of orders chosen after the Norman Conquest, a desire for spiritual salvation undoubtedly weighed heavy in the minds of patrons.²⁹ For all founders, generally members of the upper echelons of society competing in the exercise of power, the wheels of political fortune could first raise and then crush them. Spiritual comfort or safety were consequently important considerations. Eye Priory in Suffolk provides an apposite example,

²⁷ Parsons, 'Sites and monuments of the Anglo-Saxon mission', pp. 291–4.

²⁸ Mellows and Mellows (eds and transl.), *The Peterborough Chronicle of Hugh Candidus*, p. 2.

²⁹ Harper-Bill, 'Searching for salvation', pp. 22–4.

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with its founder Robert Malet's fall from grace at the start of William Rufus' reign inhibiting the development of his monastery until he was politically rehabilitated on Henry I's accession.³⁰ The establishment of monasteries also provided a strong demonstration of the founders' spirituality and place in society, both as a concept and as a physical reality. Eye Priory was very personally identified with Malet, hence its difficult first few years. Churches, tithes and land originally granted for its endowment were regranted to the church of Saint-Sauveur, Charroux, by Roger the Poitevin, who had been given the honour of Eye on Malet's fall. Only when Malet recovered his lands were these grants restored to his priory.³¹

Throughout the Anglo-Saxon and medieval periods, land and its ownership were power and wealth. The granting of enough land necessary to endow a monastery constituted an active statement of affluence, both in having the land to dispose of, and in having enough to be able to give up to form a useable endowment.³² These necessary gifts ensured that monastic foundations were expensive and an option unavailable to most: in comparison to well over a thousand parish churches built in the diocese of Norwich, the majority of which were extant within some form of parochial structure by c.1200, only seventy-four regularised monasteries had been founded in the same area, including those that, as alien priories, were effectively grants of land to larger Continental houses.³³ Quite simply, the expense of a monastery said something about the status and ambitions of its founder. At the same time, as the Middle Ages progressed, the creation of new monasteries, although still expensive, came to be increasingly undertaken by individuals from lower social levels. Examples in Norfolk include Wendling, founded in 1265×1267 by the successful clerk William de Wendling, and Ingham, founded in 1360 by a household knight, Sir Miles Stapleton.³⁴ In both of these cases, the better survival of documentary evidence in addition to the archaeological has helped to provide a more secure contextual basis upon which to show the founders' motives in establishing these religious houses. And while the creation of new monastic institutions had become a possibility for men of less exalted rank, the continued infrequency of such religious patronage was the very feature that continued to make it appear more remarkable and gave it a cachet. Such evidence is less accessible to the historian of the Anglo-Saxon and Norman periods but the variety of religious communities founded, and the ways in which

³⁰ Lewis, 'King and Eye'; Hart, 'William Malet and his family', especially at pp. 155–9.

³¹ Lewis, 'King and Eye', pp. 579–80.

³² Although these areas need not have been especially extensive or generous in terms of the founders' overall landholdings. In her examination of the patronage of the wealthy Clare family, Jennifer Ward concluded that 'there was a strong element of hard-headed realism in the monastic endowment, and the Clares by no means impoverished themselves in making their grants, a large proportion of which consisted of churches and tithes . . . a source of revenue which they could themselves no longer fully exploit': Ward, 'Fashions in monastic endowment', p. 428. For the use of churches and tithes see Harper-Bill, 'Struggle for benefices' and Kemp, 'Monastic possession of parish churches'. As Emma Cownie has pointed out, foundation largesse might often actually be paid for by undertenants whose own rights, for instance tithes, might be granted 'from under them': Cownie, *Religious Patronage in Anglo-Norman England*, p. 178.

³³ This includes the Anglo-Saxon Benedictine foundations of St Benet's, Bury and Rumburgh.

³⁴ Vincent, 'Will of William of Wendling'; Pestell, 'Of founders and faith'.

they were made, speak of the range of both institutions' and their founders' aims and desires. King Edgar's use of reformed Benedictine houses to spearhead the tenth-century monastic reform contrasted very clearly with the type of religious community patronised within the old East Anglian kingdom, without any Benedictine foundations until the royal intervention of Cnut c.1020.³⁵ And yet, religious patronage and devotion continued in the region up to the eve of the Conquest, as shown by the Benedictine cells of Clare and Rumburgh, a probable priestly community at Walsingham, and possibly the cult of St Walstan at Bawburgh.³⁶

Several points may coincide here. Anglo-Saxon minsters differed somewhat from the monastic ideals of the Norman aristocracy. Regularisation of their priestly communities seems to have been a favoured option in the years following the Conquest, and the monastic order chosen for such moves could vary, Benedictines (as at Wymondham), Cluniacs (Mendham) or Augustinians (Walsingham) all being acceptable. Given the dearth of Anglo-Saxon Benedictine monasteries in East Anglia, and their foundation generally under royal influence, it seems possible that the native population at Domesday, with its above average numbers of free peasantry, may have approached religious patronage in slightly different ways to other areas of England. For instance, East Anglia's distinctive social structure possibly explains the region's density of parish churches, many small and privately owned. It may similarly have led to the more traditional communities of priests being favoured over the Benedictine monasteries founded by royalty or servants of the crown like Æthelwold, Oswald and Dunstan. By the same token, not only did Anglo-Saxon communities appear lax to the new Norman masters: their replacement with Benedictine houses, or those of French origin in the Cluniacs, could bring associations of Normandy, governance, and more centralised power. The new monasteries therefore also contained elements of social control.

The wave of monastic patronage immediately following 1066 essentially saw two types of foundation. On the one hand, there was the type of house represented by Eye or Wymondham, requiring the considerable investment of resources upon a site often with an important Anglo-Saxon past. On the other hand, alien priories like Welle or Lessingham had no clear Anglo-Saxon antecedents and no infrastructural investment, which indicates their exploitation as estates to Continental mother houses. Some may quibble at such a rigid distinction: Blythburgh, for instance, may originally have been made a cell of St Osyth's, only being staffed by canons when it attained independence about thirty years later.³⁷ Eye Priory, too, was one of the earliest foundations in the region and was alien in being a cell of St Mary's, Bernay. But, just as Blythburgh attained independence, so Eye was denizenised.³⁸ Their experiences serve only to show how they differed from the other alien houses in the region.

³⁵ Excluding Ely as an East Anglian monastery because by 970 it lay with the Mercian political sphere: above Chapter 4, p. 103.

³⁶ Chapter 4, pp. 124–7 and 146–8.

³⁷ Harper-Bill (ed.), *Blythburgh Priory Cartulary*, pp. 1–3.

³⁸ The naturalisation of this previously 'foreign' institution was achieved by the payment of a £60 fine to



Plate 11. The first site of Leiston Abbey, standing isolated in extensive marshland on the East Suffolk coast. The building is the remains of a chapel built on the site of the monastic church when the abbey moved. Such is the remoteness of this location that it has been revisited in the twentieth century to build Sizewell nuclear power station, the reactor dome of which can be seen in the far distance.

That such a distinction frequently also highlights monasteries with an Anglo-Saxon past is important. Similarly, those houses that were fully developed as independent monasteries not only tended to have higher valuations than the alien priories, as seen in their 1291 *Taxatio* valuations: they were located differently and presumably meant something different too. This process is all the more interesting when some of the alien houses and ‘developed’ monasteries are considered by value. Toft Monks, a cell of St Pierre, Préux, Normandy, was valued at £40 16s 10½d in 1291.³⁹ The independent Augustinian priory at Hempton, founded 1100×1135, was in 1291 valued at £29 2s ½d; Blackborough, founded c.1150, at £36 19s 1d and Letheringham, founded c.1194, at £12 11s ¼d.⁴⁰ Toft Monks was therefore not poor by the standards of other more or less fully independent cells. However, these figures also demonstrate the generally lower value of houses founded in the twelfth century. The alien houses were largely founded in the forty years immediately after the Conquest, when extensive new landholdings were concentrated in the hands of relatively few people. Yet these alien houses’ immediate contemporaries dwarf them in endowment:

the English crown in 1385: Brown (ed.), *Eye Priory Cartulary and Charters*, ii, pp. 18–23; *VCH Suffolk*, ii, p. 74.

³⁹ Astle *et al.* (eds), *Taxatio Ecclesiastica Angliæ et Walliæ*, p. 114.

⁴⁰ For ease of reference I cite the computations of the *VCH*, based upon the individual entries in Astle *et al.* (eds), *Taxatio Ecclesiastica Angliæ et Walliæ*: *VCH Norfolk*, ii, pp. 381 and 350; *VCH Suffolk*, ii, p. 108.

Castle Acre was valued in 1291 at £215 14s 4½d, Binham at £103 7s 5¼d and Wymondham at £153 1s 2¼d.⁴¹ The difference in the scale of the projects being undertaken was unequivocal, as was the way in which they were articulated. A corollary to this wealth differential is that the status, aims and ambitions of the founders behind the foundations must also have differed.

The appropriation of Anglo-Saxon religious institutions by the new Norman aristocracy does not appear to have distinguished between those of ancient or more recent origin. Indeed, recent foundations intimately associated with more contemporary Anglo-Saxon family landholdings and power, and therefore potentially with a stronger dynamic, might arguably have attracted even greater attention from the new Norman families. What better way to signal the replacement of these people in the new order than to buy into their religious patronage, showing the continuity of the Church but with a modern face, by sponsoring new monastic orders?

In time, the increased security of the Norman aristocracy again saw shifting patterns of endowment. Just as cenobitic ideals such as isolation or concepts of liminality once again came to the fore, so the founders responsible were increasingly drawn from less elevated social circles. At Bromholm, Slevesholm and Mendham, island or island-like sites were exploited by orders often also involved in urban religious settlement (the Cluniacs and Augustinians). For all the emphasis that has been placed on the Cistercians pioneering rural landscape exploitation by eschewing built-up areas, and even depopulating the countryside, other orders were equally prepared to exploit such conditions. Perhaps more important, while the outlooks of particular monastic orders have generally provided the basis for discussion of settlement strategies, the patterns visible in the diocese of Norwich may also tell us something of monastic patrons. In particular, they were perhaps increasingly keen to see their monasteries return to a visibly remote and ascetic lifestyle. The first location of Leiston Abbey provides a stark instance of this; it must have been the most physically isolated monastic house in East Anglia (Plate 11).

'Monastic' landscapes were not necessarily reliant upon the actions or free will of religious institutions or personnel. Although certain areas were predominantly under monastic control by c.1200 (as in west Norfolk or the Fens), many monasteries occupied sites in marshy or liminal areas apparently as much as a consequence of social factors as a religious desire for isolation. The location of monasteries, and the land available for their siting, was often likely to be attributable to the position and role of the founder who was giving the land. Inevitably, therefore, political and social questions came to bear. This departs somewhat from the more general perception that places the primacy of choice or actions with the monastic community in governing or structuring locational decisions.

In seeking to understand monastic life, an essential point of departure is the genesis of the community that gave it its *raison d'être*. Only by generating models and understanding the control of the surrounding social landscape and its

⁴¹ *VCH Norfolk*, ii, pp. 356, 343 and 337.

Conclusions

past can we hope to see how monasteries may have stood out in society, creating an impact and imparting meaning. From the earliest Anglo-Saxon *monasteria* to those monasteries of the late twelfth century, this intimate involvement with the laity, and the tensions it produced, are central to our enquiry about the nature of communal religious life. In discussing the ‘other monasticism’ of the military orders, nuns, hermits and anchorites, Roberta Gilchrist has commented that ‘the material culture of monasticism was concerned as much with ideologies as with economic production’.⁴² This is true, but as I have sought to demonstrate, these ideologies were not purely those of monasteries or their inmates. Instead, they were ideologies open to negotiation and different readings by a multiplicity of audiences. Within this, the role of the founder was crucial – a fact we ignore at our peril.

⁴² Gilchrist, *Contemplation and Action*, p. 217.

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